

THE DEBT



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THE DEBT

THE LATEST NOVELS

THE NARROW HOUSE

By EVELYN SCOTT

GODS

By SHAW DESMOND

THE LA CHANCE MINE MYSTERY

By S. CARLETON

BEAUTY—AND MARY BLAIR

By ETHEL M. KELLEY

THE GLORIOUS HOPE

By JANE BURR

DUCKWORTH & CO.

LONDON . . W.C.3

57640

THE DEBT

By

G. P. ROBINSON



LONDON

DUCKWORTH & CO.

3 HENRIETTA STREET, COVENT GARDEN, W.C.

TO
CEDRIC BOUSTEAD
IN TOKEN OF FRIENDSHIP

First published in 1921

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PART I

HOW THE DEBT WAS INCURRED

CHAPTER I

IT is the modern fashion to catch one's hero in his cradle ; to take him through the process of teething and the other ills that infantile flesh is heir to ; and to base upon his behaviour to his nurse his future attitude towards the other sex. But if the child is father to the man, then the baby is his grandfather, and as such may be discounted as a remote though necessary relation. At the age of one, all children, to the masculine eye at least, are precisely alike. At three, they are either big for their age or small for their age. At seven, they have developed distinctive features, but cannot be said to have achieved an individuality. The seed is there, but it is as yet underground, and as to when it first pricks its way through the earth and becomes visible is for the philosopher, not the novelist, to decide. Babyhood is the unread preface ; adolescence the first chapter of the book.

* * * * *

“ Damn ! ” said Richard Patterson Goodall, and then by way of elaborating this theme, “ Blast, blast, blast ! ”

He would have liked to have expanded the idea still further, but at the age of thirteen the vocabulary of a nicely-educated boy is necessarily limited, and for the past three years Dick had been brought up at the strictest of preparatory schools. There he had acquitted himself with credit. He had been head of the school and captain of the football eleven and had crowned these attainments by

winning a history scholarship at Harrow, whither he was now bound.

It was the last day of the summer holidays and, sitting in the room previously known as the nursery but now dignified by the title of "study," he speculated with some misgiving and a little amateurish blasphemy upon what the evening might bring forth.

He was an only child and books had taken the place of brothers. He had tramped Europe with Gerard and Denys, had assisted at the storming of Front-de-Bœuf's Castle, and had fought alongside D'Artagnan at the siege of La Rochelle—in effect, an old campaigner.

Tom Brown was the big brother, who told him about public school. Of course he had read other school stories, but Tom seemed to speak with more authority than the rest, for the weight of countless cheap editions carried conviction to Dick's mind. Though he had been assured that the book was a back number so far as bullying was concerned, he did not feel at all happy upon this point. He could hardly visualize himself as laying out even the least of Flashman's disciples. Plucky enough in the moment of action, he was too imaginative not to be a coward in anticipation.

He got up and began to walk about the room, fingering his books, cricket bats and other possessions, with a half-pleasant feeling that he was doing it for the last time. Of course he knew that he wasn't, but there was a sense of finality about it all. He felt that tremendous issues were involved and that he was far too young to grapple with them, that it was unfair to expect him to do so.

His last toy, a miniature submarine, he picked up and threw into the corner with a dramatic and ridiculous gesture as though it were the symbol of his discarded childhood. The absurdity of this action and of his whole train of thought presently forced itself upon his mind and he

laughed, remembering that there were hundreds of boys in circumstances similar to his own. Surely they didn't all behave like this.

The luncheon gong cut short his reflections and Dick hastened to obey the summons. On the analogy of the condemned criminal, he had been allowed to choose his own luncheon, and boiled chicken was not a thing to be despised even though the heavens fell.

As he crossed the hall, he heard his father's voice presumably answering some question of his mother's.

"Oh, nonsense! The boy will soon shake down. School days are the happiest time of one's life. No worry . . ." He was continuing on the usual hackneyed lines, when Dick entered.

James Goodall, Dick's father, was a middle-aged city merchant with a comfortable fortune, which, as he frequently boasted, had been honestly earned, every penny of it, though he neglected to add that his father had done most of the earning. A caricaturist would see him as a bald head, thick eyebrows, waxed moustache and a watch-chain. He carried mediocrity to a fine art and was so commonplace that he was almost original. Majorities always claimed him, and his soul, if it could have been painted, would have made a fine symbolic picture of a crowd. He was frequently right and always correct. One quality, and one only, he demanded from his fellows—gentility. A man might be a bore, he might even be a scoundrel, but provided the requisite standard of gentility was attained, Mr. Goodall would whitewash him with "At any rate, he's a very gentlemanly sort of fellow," as though this was the ultimate test of virtue. He had two stories, which he told constantly; one was about a stockbroker and depended for its point upon an abstruse mathematical calculation, which no one ever had the energy to work out; the other was about a solicitor and had apparently no point at all. He may be allowed to stand down, when it is

added that he never drank his after-dinner port without saying "Success to Temperance."

Dick's mother was still a pretty woman, with a romantic attitude towards everything in life save her husband. Why she had ever married him remained a mystery, for an intense dislike of the unconventional was their only common characteristic. That she could ever have felt any strong emotion towards him seemed incredible, and if any such emotion had existed it had long ago subsided into a gentle tolerance. Dickie and religion were the twin lamps that lit Mrs. Goodall's life, though she worshipped both her God and her son without comprehension. A staunch Anglican ("We are all Catholics, my dear, I suppose you mean a Roman Catholic"), she was a member of countless charitable committees which attempted the conversion of the poor by distributing tracts and underclothing. She was one of those women who abound in good works, especially when they are woollen. Being incapable of logical reasoning, she was guided solely by sentiment and had a disconcerting habit of clinching an argument with "It isn't RIGHT." A great but inaccurate talker, she could surround a subject with words without ever touching it, while her favourite form of repartee was to cite an inappropriate proverb. She invariably missed an allusion and had a genius for misquotation. From the passionate adoration of his childhood, Dick had begun to criticize her, but, though there was little sympathy between them, there was a very real love, intensified by the fact that he was an only child.

The party was completed by Richard Goodall, Dick's uncle and godfather, who seemed to have monopolized all the oddities that the family contained. A bachelor, he was not even credited with the usual unhappy love affair, though it was a family tradition, originated by Dick's father, to believe that he had a wife and children living in concealment at Balham, Balham being so shamefully

suburban that it was supposed to add sting to the reproach. In response to his brother's inevitable greeting "Well, how are they all at Balham?" Uncle Dick would reply, "If you must be a fool, for God's sake buy a new suit of motley." Such had been their daily salutation for years.

Unlike his brother, Richard Goodall was tall and very thin with an intellectual face and a weak mouth. He wore an old-fashioned choker collar and a black satin stock, from which a pearl pin projected a good half-inch, and undoubtedly he would have been more at home in the Pickwick Club than in a Mayfair drawing-room. He had worshipped at every intellectual shrine from Egyptology to Tariff Reform: each had claimed him for a month or two only to be then discarded in favour of a new and more fascinating goddess. His sister-in-law often said that he had been rightly christened, as he reminded her so much of Mr. Dick in *David Copperfield*, but as she probably meant Mr. Micawber, the comparison was too obscure to be valuable. At lunch and dinner a place was always laid for him at his brother's table and he seldom failed to appear at one or other of these meals.

Dickie thanks God quickly for what they were about to receive and the party proceeded to the dismemberment of the chicken.

"I've got a committee meeting on this evening," announced Mrs. Goodall. "Six o'clock—such an unreasonable hour. We're trying to form a social club—with even-song twice a week—for cabmen's wives: they're left so much alone, you know. Personally I'm far more sorry for the horses. I wish we could do something for them."

"But a cab horse is not very orthodox, my dear Lorna," said Uncle Dick, who had suffered attempted conversion at the hands of his sister-in-law. "In fact, the majority, I believe, are dissenters, while some are frankly agnostic."

"I do wish you wouldn't be profane, especially in front of Dickie," rejoined Mrs. Goodall with gentle Christian

annoyance. "You're always filling the boy's head with nonsense—and harmful nonsense, too."

"Nonsense can only harm fools and Dickie's not a fool. It's only sense that can hurt a wise man," cried Uncle Dick provokingly, but no one attempted to digest this remark.

"Oh, leave Richard alone, Lorna," said Mr. Goodall. "His only trouble is that he's got too many ideas." He paused and every one, including the butler, knew instinctively what was coming. It came with a fine sense of inevitability. "I always say Richard's got the brains of the family—and I've got the beauty." He chuckled heavily, and although they had all heard it scores of times before, the others gave him a dutiful smile. It is by such ties as this that English family life is held together.

To Dick the meal seemed endless and the afternoon which followed achieved the proportions of an historical epoch. Though nobody mentioned the time, the clock appeared to claim every one's attention. Tea provided an interlude, but when that was over he could contain himself no longer.

"Well, mother?"

Mrs. Goodall nodded.

"You'd better go and have a wash while they're fetching a cab," said Mr. Goodall with a rare display of tact. Dick went gratefully and, after an elaborate wash, wasted a few minutes examining himself in the glass with a view to discovering anything in his appearance that might give rise to adverse comment. A boy with fair hair and blue eyes looked back at him—not a handsome face, but saved from insignificance by the humorous eyes and mouth. His hair was naturally curly, but Dick had spent much of his pocket-money on brilliantine to make it lie flat, a problem which he had finally solved, much to his mother's annoyance, by having his head clipped.

Somewhat comforted by this inspection, he returned to make his adieux.

"Well, good-bye, dad."

"Good-bye, my boy. Work hard and let me have a good report." And Mr. Goodall slipped a couple of sovereigns into Dick's hand with the embarrassed air of a man under-tipping a waiter.

"Don't keep the cab waiting, darling!" said Mrs. Goodall. "You'll be back again very soon, you know. The stroke of time brings round the longest day. Write me to-night and let me know that you've got there safely."

"Oh, rather," said Dick with a nonchalance he was far from feeling.

Jauntily he gathered up his luggage, a top-hat box and a small, offensively new bag with his name printed with startling distinctness upon it. His trunk had already been sent on in advance, and with this scanty baggage he felt rather like Dick Whittington. Without looking back he ran down the steps, pleased that the ordeal of saying good-bye was over.

Baker Street Station was reached without incident and Dick entered, holding the bag close to his leg in order to hide his identity from a presumably inquisitive world. Baker Street is the rendezvous of little trains. It is busy without being impressive. Dick felt that he needed the dignity of Victoria or the dirt of Euston as a setting for his adventure, which somehow seemed belittled by the suburban intimacy of the station.

He sauntered on to the platform, trying to appear at ease among the groups of boys, who, he felt certain, were also bound for Harrow. Among these he noticed a youngster from his preparatory school called Bates, who seemed to know every one and was hailing the most Olympian-looking young men by their Christian names. Uncertain whether he wished to be recognized, Dick strolled past him with an air of unconcern, but the other at once accosted him :

"Hullo, young Goodall. Heard you were coming up by this train. Whose house are you in?"

"Merrick's."

"Not a bad place. I'm in Soames' myself."

A moment later the train drew in and Dick followed his friend into a compartment already crowded with boys. During the journey nobody addressed him and, as he felt too shy to venture a remark on his own, he listened admiringly but without comprehension to Bates, who discussed women in a very knowing fashion, embroidering his stories with obstetric details. His repetition of certain adjectives was another thing that filled Dick with an awful pleasure. At home any lapse on his father's part had always been sternly checked by his mother. Even a "damn" was a rare visitor in the Goodall household. Yet here the most wonderful though monotonous adjectives flew about unchecked. Decidedly he was growing up.

As the train neared Harrow, Dick looked out of the window. The sun had gone down and the hill stood, stark, austere, silhouetted against the evening sky. Rising out of the flat landscape, now growing indistinct in the twilight, it gave one a sense of domination, of aloofness. It was too dark to make out the details of the buildings: they seemed in a sombre mass to strain upwards, as though trying to reach that dark spire, pointing with a stern simplicity to heaven.

Dick was impressed, but the spell failed to catch his companion.

"There's our damned old prison" was the only comment that it drew from Bates.

They walked up the hill together until Bates halted outside a large gaunt house.

"That's Merrick's," he said. "Ring the bell and say 'I'm Willie' or whatever your name is and they'll tell you what to do."

The door was opened by a man-servant of the old family

retainer type who was commonly known as "Winkles," though the origin of this nickname was lost in antiquity.

"Mister?" he asked.

"Goodall."

"Exactly, sir; quite so," he replied, as though Dick had successfully given the countersign to a challenge. "Mr. Merrick is engaged, sir; occupied. I will show you your room."

He led the way up several flights of stairs and along a corridor in which several boys were chatting; they took no notice of Dick, who, by this time, was accustomed to being ignored. Before a door at the end of this passage his guide halted.

"Here you are, sir; that's your room," he said in the manner of a conjurer producing the chosen card.

Dick knocked and entered. As he did so a boy, about eighteen months his senior, looked up from the trunk which he was unpacking.

"Which are you—Goodall or Trevannagh?"

"Goodall."

"Well, I'm Shannon," said the other with an air of repartee and went on with his unpacking.

Dumping down his baggage, Dick took stock of this new acquaintance.

Shannon was a slim, handsome boy with a firm mouth and chin, which gave to his face a decision and force of character unusual in one of his age. His dark hair and eyes and sallow complexion betrayed his southern blood, for he inherited these good looks from his Spanish mother, who, when he was three years old, had died in giving birth to his sister. His father, a well-known writer, had allowed his son the freedom of a large and catholic library, and at the age when most boys are revelling in Ainsworth and Fenimore Cooper, young Shannon had been reading Swinburne and Oscar Wilde. From them he had learnt a somewhat perverse philosophy and a maturity of expression

which manifested itself by frequent excursions into epigram. Always posing, he was saved from being a prig solely by his good nature and his sense of the absurd, and he possessed the great gift of being able to do a kindness without leaving a sense of obligation. It is possible that, in christening him Julian Dane Romanes, his parents had foreseen and provided against his future eccentricities, but unlike most boys, who would have been driven to shameful concealment of such a baptismal outrage, Shannon was inordinately proud of his name and had carved it with elaborate arabesques on the side of his bed.

Satisfied with his inspection of Shannon, Dick turned his attention to the room. It was a somewhat cheerless prospect : the three Harrow beds, which let down at night and in the daytime tried unsuccessfully to disguise themselves as cupboards, the battered washing-stands and chests of drawers, the cheap wooden chair and plain deal table, the threadbare lattice of the carpet, all gave an impression of acute discomfort. A wicker arm-chair of Shannon's did its best, but it looked out of place in the general bleakness of the room, while the walls, indecent in their nakedness, showed plainly where the pictures of the last occupants had hung. Shannon divined Dick's thoughts.

"Not quite the happy home, as illustrated in the advertisement of a furnish-by-instalments firm, is it? Still, we'll soon get it shipshape! May as well start hanging my pictures: that'll brighten things up a bit."

When Shannon had gone to Harrow for his first term, he had levied toll on his father's friends for the decoration of his room. The result was a delightful and unique little collection. There was a capital caricature, by a famous black-and-white artist, of Shannon in Etons and a Harrow straw, and another one of his father. A pair of water-colour sketches of the Hill pleased Dick immensely; one of them was of the same evening view that had so impressed him, the sketch showing that the artist too had felt that

sense of isolation and high endeavour. There was also a picture in oils by a post-impressionist, an extraordinary affair, consisting mainly of detached limbs and features. It might have meant anything, but the artist, with a certain sense of fitness, had christened it "Babel." Dick admired each of them respectfully, as Shannon with pride and precision distributed them round the walls.

"Yes, they're not bad, are they? Help to stimulate the classical intellect," said the latter. "If you think of buying any pictures yourself, for God's sake don't indulge in 'Deer drinking by moonlight' after Landseer, or anything like that. You may not believe it, but I once shared a room with a man who insisted on hanging up an oleograph of the 'Death of Nelson.' It was horrible." He shuddered.

"You'd better come and choose them for me," Dick suggested.

"Right. Our Mr. Shannon is entirely at your disposal. I suppose you don't know much about this place?"

"I've read *The Hill* through twice," said Dick.

"Ah! The child's guide to knowledge. Not a bad book, but——" He paused as though about to deliver some peculiarly trenchant criticism, then seemed to think better of it. "You'd better get your things unpacked. Take my advice—and that bed. It'll be near the fire, when we get one."

"I will," said Dick, who began to feel a sense of proprietorship in the room and to regard the third and unknown lessee as a trespasser. "I say, what's the name of the other chap who's sharing with us?"

"Trevannagh. My gov'nor met his—he's Lord Kintorpe, you know—at a dinner the other day and I was appointed his guide, philosopher and friend. By the way, Merry said something about your being a scholar. Is that right?"

"I did win a history scholarship," Dick admitted blushing.

“Good. Don’t be ashamed of it, it’s not a previous conviction or anything like that. Besides I don’t suffer fools gladly : in fact, when I come across them, it’s generally the fools who suffer.”

Not wishing to spoil the effect of this remark by further conversation, Shannon continued his picture-hanging to the whistled accompaniment of the trio in “Faust,” while Dick began to unpack. Uncertain whether it was the thing to display one’s family portraits to the public gaze, he hid the photographs of his father and mother among his clothes and stowed them away in the chest of drawers. The correct place for a Bible was another matter that called for judicious decision, for he had no wish to suffer martyrdom as a religious prig. The bookshelf looked inviting, but on the whole he felt a drawer to be safer, though it occurred to him that this craze for concealment was bound to produce congestion.

Suddenly Shannon held up a warning hand. “Merry’s step for a fiver,” he pronounced and a second later the door opened to prove him correct.

Mr. Merrick was a tall, bulky man with a scholarly stoop. He was completely bald, but wore a ragged moustache and beard, as though to prove that his head was really capable of growing hair. When speaking, he threw out short, jerky sentences, which showed no sequence of thought ; when silent, he had a habit of swaying nervously from side to side. A fine scholar, he had written several text-books, which were in general use, but in the capacity of house-master he was an utter failure. Boys had no interest for him and he bracketed them with women as the cardinal error of creation. That he had ever been young himself seemed incredible and his colleagues were wont to declare that he must have been born with a beard.

For several seconds he stood swaying in the doorway—an eminently grotesque figure.

“Well, Goodall, I hope you’ll be happy here. Supper’s

at eighty-thirty, lights out at ten. I congratulate you on your scholarship. Capital! Don't be late for prayers. Half-past nine. You'll soon feel at home. Shannon will—um—will show you the ropes," he concluded with the embarrassed air of a man making a bon mot and doubtful as to how it will be received.

Dick said "Thank you, sir," without quite knowing why and an awkward silence ensued, which was finally broken by Mr. Merrick.

"Trevannagh will be here in a minute: saying good-bye to Lord Kinthorpe. What a peculiar picture, Shannon!" This was the post-impressionist masterpiece. "'Ars celare artem,' I suppose. Have you got your straw hat, Goodall? Capital! Ah, here is Trevannagh. Shannon and Goodall, Trevannagh. You'll soon feel at home." He paused again and looked at them impressively through his gold-rimmed spectacles. Dick expected some fatherly advice to follow, but with a curt "good night" the house-master turned abruptly on his heel and swayed out of the room.

"Is he tight or does he always go on like that?" asked Dick.

"Nerves," replied Shannon in the manner of a Harley Street specialist diagnosing a difficult case. "If he didn't do that, he'd probably chew gum or bite his nails."

Trevannagh, having shaken hands with the two earlier arrivals, collapsed gratefully into Shannon's arm-chair and seemed on the brink of slumber. He was a sturdily-built youngster, good looking and good natured, with a sleepy expression and a certain slowness of movement which gave him an air of incurable laziness. A pure Anglo-Saxon type, he had the same colouring as Dick and, indeed, was not unlike him save that the mouth and jaw were firmer. To imagine him ever becoming surprised or angry was impossible; these two feelings seemed to be dummy notes in his emotional register. Quite willing

to take people on trust, he declined to believe that many things really mattered, but this impression of indolence, which was due not to stolidity but to emotional laziness, was deceptive. If he did a thing it was done slowly, but it was done efficiently. Self-possession, modesty and a delightful smile were his chief assets in the art of making friends.

On the strength of his hour's seniority, Dick was disposed to be patronizing.

"That's your bed over there : it lets down, you know."

"Oh, is it ? Right. Thanks !" drawled Trevannagh ; it was characteristic that he did not even glance at the bed.

When a moment later the bell rang for supper, Shannon shook his head. "No," he said, as Dick got up. "Frankly I don't recommend it. Were I a racing-tout, I would offer ten to one, bar one, on Cottage Pie. The one I have barred is Irish Stew out of Refuse. Surely we all have souls above cottage pie !"

Trevannagh was rarely moved to curiosity, but the subject of food was to him a vital one.

"Do they really feed one badly here ?"

"Well," replied Shannon judiciously, "the difference between this place and the Ritz would be manifest even to a dyspeptic. I am told that the food is wholesome. Personally I detest wholesome food ; it reminds one of Mrs. Humphrey Ward's novels."

Trevannagh smiled with lazy appreciation and when, soon afterwards, Shannon left the room for a moment, he asked Dick what he thought of him.

"Well, what do you ?" inquired Dick cautiously.

"Seems a rum sort of fellow."

"Oh, I think you'll like him : he's quite a decent sort really," said Dick, as though defending an old friend.

In the course of the evening several boys drifted into the room to see Shannon. According to custom they ignored the presence of the other two, but on one occasion their

next-door neighbour, one Hennesey, a member of the school eleven, came in and addressed himself to Dick:

"Old Merry told me that one of the men in this room was a scholar. Are you the infant prodigy?"

Dick pleaded guilty.

"Good. You'll probably be in my form and can have the privilege of doing all my work."

Dick blushed, but, far from being dismayed at this prospect, he was rather pleased: this was the school of Tom Brown and Arthur and he felt more at home.

Picking up a note that was lying on the table, Hennesey spelt out the name.

"Honourable Douglas Trevannagh. Lor', dearie, 'ow we does mingle with the haristocracy."

But the honourable one refused to rise to so clumsy a cast. "Oh, is there a letter for me?" he asked with his lazy smile.

Having drawn a double blank the visitor turned to Shannon, though he knew of old that but little change could be anticipated from that quarter.

"Well, young Shan, I thought you'd been asked to leave in order to avoid being sacked."

"My dear Hennesey, when you are not uninformed, you are misinformed."

"Less of it! I'm going to ask the old man for my sixth-form privs to-morrow and in preparation thereof I've just bought a very whippy line in canes."

Shannon shrugged his shoulders: an appeal to brute force always disgusted him.

"Why people in the lower school should get their sixth-form privs is beyond me," he said impersonally.

"Well, they do sometimes, so you'd better be careful." And the intruder departed, convinced of verbal victory.

"What are sixth-form privs?" asked Dick.

"Oh, they give one a right to fag us poor devils and, what's more, to whop us on the slightest provocation.

However, old Hanners isn't a bad sort of chap—strong in the arm and weak in the head, you know."

At half-past nine the bell rang for prayers and Dick was enabled to take comprehensive stock of the whole house. In bulk, it was to him rather a terrifying assembly, consisting of about forty boys, whose ages ranged from fourteen to nineteen. Dick concentrated his attention on the older fellows and felt very small indeed.

However, this inspection, made between his fingers, which were screening his face in supposed devotion, was not a long one. Mr. Merrick hastened through a couple of prayers and followed them up quickly with six verses from the Bible. It was his custom to read straight through the Testaments at the rate of six verses a night, omitting only those passages which might provoke merriment among the seniors or injure the morals of the juniors. It was generally believed that, when he reached the end of Revelation, he would retire.

This ceremony completed, the three regained their room and, to the accompaniment of much creaking, lowered their beds.

"I don't see why we shouldn't have quite a sound time in this room," said Shannon, as the lights were turned off. "Trevannagh, you represent birth. You're brains, Goodall. And I—I am beauty. A very strong combination."

"Oh, rather, I think it'll be jolly decent," agreed Dick, sleepy but polite.

"Um," still more sleepily, from Trevannagh.

And so came into being a partnership that was only to be broken by death.

CHAPTER II

TO Dick the first few days passed in a confusion of activities, of introduction, of discovery, of acquisition. He found himself placed in the Second Remove, a form which included Hennesey and Shannon among its twenty-five members. For this fact Dick was profoundly grateful: without Shannon he felt that he must have been utterly lost. The difficulty of being at the right place at the right time exercised him immensely during that first week, and he shuddered at the thought of the terrible scholastic crimes that he might in all innocence commit.

Trevannagh, placed in the next form below Dick, took all these matters more easily. He was shepherded to the different schoolrooms by a small, self-important youngster, named Watson, who would burst into their room and with considerable urgency summon Trevannagh to accompany him.

"We've only got a minute to get down to the Museum schools, so for Heaven's sake come on."

To which Trevannagh would reply, "Oh, have we? Right," and start to look casually for his straw hat, which was always the last of the three to be inspected.

"Oh, do come on." Watson's voice would rise to a shriek of entreaty. Yet somehow he was never late. . . .

Dick was at first disposed to manifest his new-found liberty of speech by qualifying every noun with the adjective "bloody," but this habit was sternly checked by

Shannon, who denounced him as "a man of one adjective." Another matter, which came in for criticism, was his friendship with Bates, of whom he saw a good deal during the first few days.

"That chap's no good to anybody's army," Shannon declared. "I should drop him if I were you. Pure impertinence on my part, I grant you, but kindly meant."

"He's not a bad sort," Dick argued, "and he seems very popular with all the 'bloods.'"

"Yes. That's just the trouble."

"Why?"

Shannon fell back upon the trio in "Faust," but Dick would not allow him to whistle himself out of an explanation.

"Why?" he persisted.

"Far be it from me to deliver a lecture on purity," Shannon began and then, dropping his pedantic style, he explained lucidly and concisely the basis of Bates' friendships and the desirability of not becoming too intimate with him. Dick listened to this exposition in round-eyed wonder, which finally gave place to disgust, and thereafter, though too indecisive by nature to provoke an open breach, he gradually dropped Bates, much to Shannon's relief.

At the end of the first week Mrs. Goodall came down to Harrow and took Dick out to lunch. During the meal she asked a number of leading questions, which veered from the ethical to the sanitary and back again. She would insist on speaking of the school "Church" as she declared that "chapel" smacked of Methodism, while some of her loudly expressed views on the more intimate aspects of drainage drove Dick to whispered remonstrance. Tea, to which Shannon and Trevannagh were also invited, was more successful. The latter made a Gargantuan meal, while Shannon, who always ate sparingly, more from pose than lack of desire, sought to excuse.

"I'm afraid Trev's manners are dreadful, Mrs. Goodall, but so's his appetite."

"Oh, boys will be boys," she replied, laughing.

"Boys are boys," Shannon corrected gravely. "Boys will be men."

By the time every one's hunger was sated it was almost dusk and, as Dick strolled down the hill with his mother, the bell for "lock-up" began to ring.

"The curfew tolls and now the day is done," said Mrs. Goodall with an air of apt quotation. "I suppose you mustn't come any further, Dickie?"

"No, or I'll be late. Good-bye, mummie."

"Good-bye, darling. Tell me, are you really happy?"

"Oh, I'm having the hell of a ruddy good time," he replied and before the astonished lady could recover he had started back up the hill.

Fagging Dick did not find very irksome. Having obtained his sixth-form privileges, as he had foretold, Hennesey elected him his "find," which meant that Dick had to lay breakfast and tea for him in his room and fetch the food from the kitchen. Another prophecy from the same source also came true and Dick was privileged to assist the great man in his leisurely pursuit of learning. The procedure was this: when any work was to be prepared, Dick would start in on it laboriously; when he was half-way through, Shannon would lend a hand and obtain a familiarity with the subject, just sufficient to save him from punishment; finally Hennesey would appear and a rapid intensive revision would ensue, after which they would sally forth to the ordeal by construe.

That Shannon after four terms should still be in the lower school astonished Dick, for he recognized in his friend a brain far more acute than his own. But Shannon contended that the whole system of modern education bored him,

“Mathematics!” he would say. “A soul-petrifying science to anyone with a sense of beauty. There is something so sordid about a compound interest sum, and as for a problem in Algebra it reminds one of the puzzle-corner in *Tit-Bits*.”

He displayed an energetic ingenuity in avoiding work of all kinds, though, as Dick pointed out, he took more trouble in so doing than was actually demanded by the work itself. Dick admired him prodigiously: even Hennesey, magnificent in the speckled straw of the cricket eleven, seemed a less memorable figure and he was not a little proud of his friendship. Trevannagh, also, he learned to like immensely. There was something reposeful and dependable about his lazy good nature, and a sympathy of common inexperience helped them to a sympathy of common understanding.

Both of them soon fell into the general routine of Harrow life and the term dragged on with a monotony, broken by occasional visits from relatives and friends. Uncle Dick came down and horrified his nephew by walking in the middle of the road. Remonstrance only provoked the retort “Damn it, it’s a free country,” and Dick was driven to shouted conversation from the pavement.

Lady Kinthorpe, who was regarded as one of the most beautiful women in society, was another visitor. A great political hostess, she was considered an authority on Poor Law Reform and was disposed to treat Harrow as a minor issue of the housing problem. The absence of proper washing accommodation came in for a lot of criticism and she made several indignant notes with a view to drawing up a paper upon the subject. More practical and energetic than Mrs. Goodall, she forced an interview on Mr. Merrick and after some caustic and pertinent comments upon the way he ran his house, reduced him to silence and perspiration with the remark, “A great pity you’ve never married.” She retailed this conversation at tea, and Shannon’s im-

personation of his discomfited house-master was loudly encored.

As a result of her largesse, a midnight feast was inaugurated at which grilled sausages and iced cake figured as the *pièces de résistance*. But in the middle of the banquet, ill-luck and insomnia caused a sixth-former to notice a light under their door and in the event they were all soundly "whopped." The manner in which they took their chastisement was characteristic; Shannon with an air of bored protest, Trevannagh with stoical indifference and Dick in foolish and blushing discomfort.

The term slipped by and merged into holiday, during which Dick spent a week at Poldene with Trevannagh's people and in return Trevannagh stayed for the last few days at the Goodalls.

Dick's father took a great fancy to him.

"There's nothing like our old English families," he said, "and he's a splendid type—a real young aristocrat. You ought to be proud of such a friend, my boy."

About Shannon, to whom he always referred as "your other friend, Dick," he was not quite so sure. "I don't know what to make of your other friend," he would say, "he's a queer fish. Clever in his way, I don't doubt, but he's not my idea of a nice, healthy-minded English boy."

But if he did not find favour with Mr. Goodall, Shannon managed completely to enslave Uncle Dick, and the pair would sit and bandy epigrams by the hour.

"A delightful young fellow," Uncle Dick declared. "I don't know which to admire most, his brains or his impudence."

By special request the three friends retained the same room until the end of the summer term, which, with its cricket and its long hours of liberty, Dick found wholly delightful. In the evenings they would go down to "Ducker" for a bathe, and it was here that Trevannagh was at his happiest. He would plunge in with the other

two, but, after a brief swim, would emerge, wrap himself in a huge towel and, half-way between sleeping and waking, slowly masticate a large bun.

"Come on, Trev," Dick would shout, "or we'll chuck you in."

Trevannagh would rouse himself. "Well, just one more dip!" He became suddenly energetic. "I'll race you lubbers right up the bath for a stick of chocolate a side."

He invariably won. . . .

The Lords exeat for the Harrow and Eton match struck Dick as the three greatest days of his life. Trevannagh came to stay with him and they met Shannon by arrangement outside the Harrow stand; all three determined not to miss a ball of the match. Shannon felt that his keenness demanded explanation.

"You chaps mustn't think that I'm beginning to take an intelligent interest in cricket," he said, "only somehow I just have to see this game."

During the Harrow innings, Hennesey came and sat with them for a few minutes and left his sister, a pretty girl of twenty, in their charge.

"Just trot Kitty round for half an hour," he ordered. "And let her sneer at the other women's clothes and then return her to me in an undamaged condition at the back door of the pavilion."

So Dick, immensely proud of his companion, escorted her round Lords, entertaining her with explanatory biographies of the Harrow eleven, though he felt that her remark, "I think you're a perfect dear; what a pity you're not ten years older," was a breach of good taste.

Hennesey's eighty-seven was the culminating achievement of the day and Dick could not help regarding this score as in some measure his own contribution.

"He's a ripper. I know him awfully well," he told Mrs. Goodall, who was trying to manifest enthusiasm for a game which she did not even remotely understand.

"I think he's perfectly wonderful, darling," she said, afraid that further criticism might betray her.

Harrow won amid terrific excitement in the last half-hour of play and the party adjourned for the evening to Earls Court, where every one behaved in the most outrageous fashion. Even Shannon was frankly jubilant and, casting off the shackles of age, assisted in a spirited little *mêlée* round the water-chute.

Dick had never been so riotously happy.

Later he was to look back on that evening with a sense of irrevocable loss. It was the forerunner of many another evening lit with the authentic torch of laughter. And of laughter it was to stand to him as a symbol, when the torch at its brightest had been quenched and when those who had so readily kindled the flame had passed into the twilight of the Great Shadow.

* * * * *

The year which followed drifted serenely by with nothing cardinal to mark its progress. It only served to cement the friendship of the three boys, this fact being signalled by the abandonment of "Gooders, Trev and Shan" and the adoption of "Dick, Duggie and Julian." By both of his friends Dick was strongly influenced, though Shannon as the more dominant personality left the deeper impression. From him he learnt to contain his enthusiasms and to regard a display of interest as bad form. "There's nothing so ludicrous as a man in earnest," was one of Shannon's favourite dicta.

From Trevannagh, who, as Shannon pointed out, was "all purpose, while he was all pose," Dick gained a sense of proportion and fair play. And deep down in both his friends he found one basic quality, the corner-stone which held them together: beneath the affectations of Shannon and the laziness of Trevannagh there flowed a vein of strong and abiding sentimentality—of sentimentality towards each other, towards their school, towards their

country. Both would have hotly denied it, Shannon would sooner have confessed to murder, but none the less it was there, ready to respond to any call of loyalty.

Dick and Shannon worked just hard enough to secure a remove each term, until at the end of the following summer they achieved the dignity of the sixth form. Trevannagh followed them more leisurely, but, to their great delight, succeeded in performing the rare feat of obtaining his cricket "flannels" during his second year.

The evening on which he gained this distinction was a memorable one. Dick expressed his joy by repeating "By Gad, old chap, I am bucked" some hundred times, while Shannon presided at an impromptu strawberry feast and, to disguise his emotion, overate himself for the first time in his life. Trevannagh was patently the least excited of the three.

As sixth-formers neither Dick nor Shannon developed much sense of responsibility. Most of their attempts to uphold law and order were aimed at Trevannagh, whom for the first month or so they never reprimanded less than six times a day. But as he usually retorted by seizing Authority and tying its head up in an old pillow-case, their efforts did little to raise their prestige.

On Sunday evenings they were often invited to supper by Mr. Merrick—an honour for which there was never enthusiastic competition. The housemaster was an indifferent host, and it was a nice point, whether he or his guests were the more embarrassed. As after-dinner conversation he would throw out a series of questions and then gratefully sip his port, until the answers were returned. He always wound up the evening by asking after the health of Lord Kinthorpe—a compliment denied to less distinguished parents and greeted by Shannon as the one human strain in Mr. Merrick's character.

One morning at the beginning of Dick's third summer term, the three friends were sitting at breakfast, when

Shannon suddenly dropped his bombshell. Anything important he always announced with studied carelessness, in order to secure a better effect.

“Ye mangled fragments of a fish long dead,
Unsung, dishonoured and unfileted,”

he cried, apostrophizing the Kedgarce, and then with no change of tone: “Did I tell you that I was leaving at the end of this term?”

That they must all ultimately leave had been vaguely accepted by Dick and Trevannagh, but that one of them should go without the others was rank and damnable heresy.

“But you can’t,” Trevannagh protested in a shocked voice.

“I’ve got to. Besides, it’s only for a year. I’m going to Paris to study French and sow my wild oats, in the paternal phraseology. And then we’ll all go up to Oxford together. Anyway we may as well enjoy my last term.” And enjoy it they did, though the gaiety of that last bathe in “Ducker” and the farewell “brekker” at the *King’s Head* was a trifle forced and hectic.

Shannon said good-bye to them at the station, for Dick and Trevannagh, though compelled to go by a later train, had got up early to see him off.

“I never knew I cared much about this place,” he said, “but I hate going. And it isn’t merely leaving you two chaps, it’s the school itself. I suppose it gets into one’s blood and so finds its way to the heart and stays there.”

“You’ll write, of course,” said Dick.

“Oh, Lord, yes, every week.”

“Good-bye, Julian. Best of luck, old chap.”

For the first time since they had known him, he seemed to be mastered by emotion. Instead of the graceful little speech which they had expected and which, indeed, he

had prepared, he gave them a curt nod and turned away ; nor did he wave to them as the train pulled out.

"Well, Duggie ?" Dick said with a sigh.

"Good old Julian," said Trevannagh, and the tears stood in his eyes.

* * * * *

They missed Shannon enormously. At every turn they found something to remind them of him. "Ducker" provoked countless memories and they quoted him at every meal and every game. Without him the "find" degenerated into mere food and even their surreptitious hands at Bridge lost their fine sense of adventure. Meanwhile Shannon wrote them prolific letters. He was living in Paris, with a French artist, a great friend of his father's, and was confessedly enjoying himself.

"This is a city of eternal youth," he wrote, "even I am recapturing my lost boyhood and am getting younger every moment ; there seems to be some danger of my dying of juvenile decay. But these are just introductory remarks, as we used to say in the syllabus of our essays. The real subject of this letter is my first serious love affair.

"I met her at a rag in somebody's studio, though how I came to be there I can't tell you, as I didn't seem to know a soul in the place. However, I naturally gravitated towards Georgette, who informed me that she was an artiste at Olympie, but that she occasionally posed for her friends, our host, whom by the way I never discovered, being one of the favoured few.

"In corroboration of this story, she performed a skirt-dance, ending it in front of a half-finished portrait of herself, by adopting the pose of the picture. . . . I want you to visualize the scene in that studio : A long bare room with occasional rugs, the seating accommodation, apart from a couple of divans, being the floor—leaning up against the wall were a few canvases, strewn with

tortured paint (our host apparently had the impressionist craze badly). The company consisted of about a score of people, mostly men, one or two clad in the traditional blouse of the student, and all frankly rather out-at-elbows. Every one was talking at once and paying no heed to his neighbours. And there in the middle, draped in a blue gauze of caporal smoke, Georgette—wicked black eyes, an absurd little nose, cupid bow mouth and a shock of black curls. In the midst of the applause, she pirouetted across and sat down on my knee (I was one of the aristocracy on a divan) and I capitulated at once. The upshot of it all was, that after our third meeting, she proposed a *ménage*—not a bit brazenly, you know, but just as though it was inevitable. Since then I have been scouring Montmartre, but so far without success. At present, then, the matter stands there, but another instalment of this fine serial will appear in our next issue. . . . Also I have been riotously and egregiously drunk. Do you remember those occasional sly drinks of ours at Harrow and that night, when we all tried to get tight at the Cave? It only seemed to accentuate our natural good-humour. But this time it was a terrific business, and I had to be brought home in a *fiacre*. Péronard, as my friend, put me to bed, but, as my mentor, wrote and told the governor all about it. All the old man did was to write and advise me to keep off Cliequot, as one never knew where one was with a widow. He added that he didn't want to hear about wine and women, but that if I burst into song, he was to be sent for at once. Thank God, for a sensible parent!"

A subsequent letter gave the sequel to the Georgette affair. The *ménage* had been inaugurated with success and a party, but, after a fortnight's bliss, an ancient and completely superfluous aunt had appeared. There had been awkward questions and an avowal on Shannon's part of absolute ignorance of the French tongue. According

to him, Georgette was in no way to blame ; however the matter had ended in tears and a cheque.

In return for these letters, Dick and Trevannagh gave him the news of their world. Trevannagh was now captain of cricket and the biggest "blood" in the school, and he could therefore speak with authority upon all matters athletic, while Dick, as a member of the football eleven, was qualified to sub-edit Trevannagh, and, as a monitor, to discuss the intellectual life of the school. But their letters seemed parochial beside the cosmopolitanism of Shannon's budget and, conscious of their limitations, they fell back upon invoking the great past of the triple alliance—the evenings in Ducker, the suppers with Mr. Merrick, the long talks after "lights out."

In the May of the following year the pair went back to Harrow for their last term.

"Make the most of what we yet may spend" said Dick. "And then hey for Oxford!"

Trevannagh nodded. "If we beat Eton this year, I shall leave a happy man." He spoke with the air of a moribund reformer.

"Anyway, there's one thing about leaving: we shall find old Julian again."

"Yes, it'll be great seeing the old bird. I wonder if he's changed much."

And forthwith they fell to picturing a metamorphasized Shannon with quaint clothes and unfamiliar gestures; they figured him as a youthful edition of their French master—with sartorial improvements.

Towards the end of the term they went up to Oxford to pass "Smalls," and hard upon their return to Harrow came the match at Lords. According to custom, Trevannagh stayed with the Goodalls, and it was in his presence that Dick with some guile broached the subject of his allowance at college.

"What are you going to get, Duggie?" he asked

ingenuously, when Mr. Goodall, in spite of having debated the matter pretty thoroughly, had professed ignorance.

"Four-fifty." Trevannagh had been carefully coached in his part.

Mr. Goodall had previously decided on two hundred and fifty as the right figure, but he was not going to be out-done in generosity by a lord, and Dick knew it.

"It seems a lot of money. When I was a young man——" He paused. "All right, Dickie: we'll say four-fifty. Still, it does seem a lot." He brooded darkly and, as a sort of reprisal, told them his "stock-broker" story, "just to show how tight money was in those days."

On the morning of the match a letter arrived from Shannon. He regretted that he could not be with them, but he was now making a comprehensive tour of the French watering-places, with an eye on the next long vacation. The letter was written from Paris-Plage.

"One hears as much Cockney," he wrote, "in these little towns round here, as one does in Whitechapel. Boulogne is more suburban than Balham, and our lower classes manifest towards the French girls a certain knowing lewdness, which makes one ashamed of one's nationality. The Victorian tradition of Parisian wickedness dies hard, and it is perhaps consoling to know that the middle classes still read and believe yellow-backs. This place is too expensive for the aitchless, but Lancashire Cotton is flaunting the lace of the Folies Bergères with a most distressing ostentation."

The Eton and Harrow match was entirely Trevannagh's affair: he took twelve Eton wickets and sealed Harrow's victory with a century in the second innings. The spectacle of a blushing and, for once, embarrassed Douglas being carried shoulder-high round the ground by a mob of enthusiastic Harrovians, remained to Dick, always as a laughable and finally as a tender memory.

The rest of the term passed all too quickly. The ordeal

of the final prizegiving merged into the supreme ordeal of the farewell sermon in chapel.

"Of you, who are leaving us, I would ask that you do not altogether forget." The Headmaster finished with simple dignity. "Never again will you have the same chance of learning loyalty. I want you to look back on Harrow not only as a place where you acquired knowledge, but as a fellowship, an union. While I lose you as scholars, I hope to keep you as friends, and as such I now greet you and bid you God-speed."

The echo of the benediction died away and Dick and Trevannagh walked out into the sunshine of their last evening. Arm in arm they rolled down the centre of the High Street, trying to make the most of those last golden grains of sand in the glass.

"There seems just one thing lacking," said Trevannagh after a long silence. "I wish to heaven old Julian were here."

And then, quite suddenly and dramatically, Shannon appeared. He was walking rapidly in their direction and seemed in nowise changed from the Shannon of a year ago. They felt vaguely defrauded by the banality of his clothes.

"Thought I must come down and assist at the funeral rites," he said briefly, and linked up arms with them. Until the last minute before "lock-up" they sauntered up and down the street, saying good-bye to other groups of men, whom they would meet a few minutes later with renewed farewells. Eight o'clock struck while Shannon was in the middle of an unheeded anecdote.

"Fulham!" Dick heard him say with a feeling that this was the climax of the story. "Why nobody lives at Fulham," I said. "You must mean Chelsea or South Kensington. Fulham's only a road and a reproach."

"Well, it's striking," said Trevannagh.

Shannon looked aggrieved. "What is the use of my talking?"

"None," said Trevannagh briefly. "Come on, Dick; see you to-morrow, old chap."

Mr. Merrick's farewell provided the necessary comic relief. He asked them both to supper, but made no reference to their approaching departure until it was time for them to say good-night.

"Sorry to lose you, Goodall," he said, "you'll be off early in the morning. I think you might open a window: very hot in here. No ballast, I'm afraid, but a pleasant companion. Sense of humour. You said something about reading law at Oxford. Gaius and Justinian both wrote abominable Latin. The Silver Age."

He turned to Trevannagh and sought inspiration for graceful speech.

"Sorry to lose you, Trevannagh, but you can't bat indefinitely against time." He swayed alarmingly, struggling for a fresh sentence. Then habit triumphed. "I trust Lord Kinthorpe is well: remember me to him. Yes, you've both done well here." He pointed to the house-groups, which covered the wall of his study. "*Si monumentum requiris, circumspice*." He held out his hand, and they felt sorry to lose even this grotesque, familiar figure.

Breakfast at Shannon's hotel the next morning was hardly a cheerful meal, and even the suggestion of the host that they should walk down the High Street smoking pipes, as a symbol of freedom, was not well received. As their train pulled out of Wembley, Dick looked back at the Hill, clean-cut against the blue August morning.

"I'm now going to shock Julian," he said, "by a display of rank sentimentality." He lifted his hat. "God bless Harrow!"

The other two smiled comprehendingly.

"Amen," they said.

CHAPTER III

THE education of Oxford is conversational rather than scholastic. You will find there an apostle of every cult, and, if you sit at his feet for an evening or two, you will acquire from him more philosophy and more profit than from any lecturer or text-book. That Oxford is the home of lost causes has been said too often to be true, but it is at least the asylum of misdirected enthusiasms. And perhaps the most misguided of these is the enthusiasm against enthusiasm. . . . "Heartiness" is the cardinal sin. It is the mark of the beast. If one should display zeal, it must be for something abnormal and unworthy. To try to obtain converts for an established creed is to be written down as a prig and a bore, but to attempt a revival of Sun-worship or a celebration of the Black Mass is to achieve a following and a reputation. Like the Athenians, Oxford is always looking for some new thing.

It was this aspect that Shannon impressed upon the other two as the train bore them to Oxford. They had a carriage to themselves, save for a young man, who had entrenched himself against conversation behind a bull-dog pipe and the *Saturday Review*.

"But where did you glean all this from?" asked Dick.

"My guv'nor."

"But things may have changed since his time."

"Oh, no. Oxford is permanently mediaeval. You'll find I'm perfectly right."

The silent young man removed his pipe.

"Balliol?" he asked.

"No. King Alfred's!"

The stranger raised his eyebrows, smiled, borrowed a match and re-entrenched himself. Unabashed, Shannon continued his thesis.

"Great discrimination must be exercised in all matters of selection: the right tobacconist, the right books, even the right wall-paper. Fortunately I've chosen mine—a sort of biscuit colour with a cubist frieze. I'm expecting great things from that wall-paper."

The young man in the corner shifted irritably, knocked out his pipe with unnecessary violence, and then as the train drew into the station: "You might ask me to one of your Black Mass celebrations. I'm sure some of our ritual's wrong. Stevenson of Merton," he added by way of explanation, and was gone.

"Damn!" said Shannon vigorously.

Oxford is the stronghold of the hansom and the horse-tram. Having secured three cabs, they passed in procession down the "Corn" and along the "High" and pulled up in front of King Alfred's College, which stands some two hundred yards above Magdalen Bridge.

They had been fortunate enough to obtain three rooms on the same staircase, Dick and Trevannagh being opposite one another on the second floor, while Shannon was directly above the former. On entering his room Dick was surprised to find awaiting him a wealth of correspondence, which inspection proved to consist entirely of circulars. Tobacconists fought for the honour of choosing his cigars, tailors for the pleasure of making his clothes; some attributing to Dick a palate which he did not possess, others a figure which they had never seen. Having committed these to the waste-paper basket, he began to take stock of his new home. Though the bedroom was extraordinarily small, the sitting-room, compared

with his study at Harrow, seemed palatial and commanded a fine view of the High Street. It was furnished with three "Varsity" arm-chairs and a quantity of rather faded blue chintz, which waged chromatic warfare with the green wall-paper. While Dick was trying to decide which of these colours should be banished, Trevannagh appeared.

"I say, old man. How does one summon the scout? Does one simply yell 'scout' as one used to shout 'boy' at Harrow for the fag or does one use his name?"

"Name, I should think."

"Well, is there any sort of generic name for a scout? Charles or Rupert or something?"

"Try 'Hi.' It's often very effective."

Trevannagh tried it. A moment later a man materialized in the doorway: so silent was his entry that he could not be said to have come. Short and of middle age, he had a disillusioned eye and an impersonal manner.

"You called, sir?" he asked. "I'm the scout on this staircase." And then with emphasis, "George, sir."

Trevannagh embarked upon the A B C of housekeeping—but the man cut him short.

"You'll both be wanting linen and crockery, I suppose, sir? If you wish it, I can let you have some." And without more ado, he handed each of them a slip of paper, on which was written a bill for these goods. Dick felt somehow that he had already paid for them, along with the rest of the furniture, but he had not the courage to dispute it.

"You're from Harrow, I see, sir," continued the man, looking at Trevannagh's old Harrovian tie. "I'm always very happy to serve Harrow gentlemen."

Both suspected this to be a variable formula. The pause which followed was broken by Shannon's voice, calling them to come and see his rooms.

"If you want anything, sir, just shout 'George,'" said

the man, and withdrew. They felt that their "Hi" had been severely reprovèd.

As they mounted the stairs to Shannon's room, Dick glanced at the door opposite. Over the lintel was printed "Baron von Ecke," but the apartment was empty and displayed a German sense of neatness.

"One of these Rhodes scholars, I suppose," Trevannagh commented. "Let's have a look at Julian's chamber of horrors."

At first glance, Shannon's room seemed to be an unhappy blend of the English and the Oriental. The severe wall-paper, the black velvet curtains and the fine oak mantel seemed to disapprove of the rich colour-scheme which the rest of the furnishings manifested. On the walls were hung a collection of cubist pictures, which, carrying on the motif initiated by the frieze, looked askance at the ordered design of the fine Turkey-carpet. But the most striking feature of the room was the wealth of cushions and the absence of normal furniture. There was a table and one oak chair, but, apart from these, there was nothing of the ordinary Oxford room. Three very low sofas and the window-seat were covered with silk cushions of every conceivable shade, but chosen so harmoniously that they did not quarrel with one another. The bookcase was hidden by a beautiful piece of tapestry, portraying a hunting scene and seemingly out of sympathy with the incoherence of the pictures. There was no desk, no easy chair, nothing to mark it down as the room of a student.

"Of course I've had a pull over you chaps," said Shannon upon a note of apology. "I came up here a month ago and fixed it all up. Well, what d'you think of it?"

"All right as a show-room, Julian," replied Trevannagh. "But to have breakfast in after a thick night—ugh!" Shannon looked annoyed.

"That's the worst of a classical education. What d'you think about it, Dick?"

"East is East and West is West, but they've met with a vengeance. It's an expression of your personality, Julian." He pointed to the splendid oak mantel. "That's for the fine solid things that are in you somewhere, and all these colours are for the drivel you talk." He paused as men do who have happened upon truth unawares.

"Oh, stop talking metaphysics or meta—whatever-it-is you're spouting," cried Trevannagh. "Who's the lady?" He pointed to a crayon sketch hanging near the window.

"That? Oh, that's Péronard's idea of Georgette."

"The deuce it is. You seem to have struck lucky in Paris, though what you can see in these dagos, to compare with a decent English girl, I can't imagine."

"My dear Duggie, if you'd really studied the question, you'd understand. English women are the most beautiful in the world—and the least attractive."

Trevannagh snorted.

"No scrapping, Duggie. We'd better find out how to clamber into these gowns before dinner is upon us. Hullo, there's the bell."

The hall of King Alfred's College is a fine building with a lofty ceiling supported by huge oaken rafters, while above the wainscot which runs round the walls, portraits of dead Masters and Fellows look down condescendingly upon their successors. Down either side of the room run two long tables, one reserved for the third year, one for the second, one for the "Freshmen" and one for the scholars. On the dais above and running at right angles to these, there is another table at which sit the "dons" and their guests. Having been warned by George, the three friends took the lowest places at the "freshmen's" table, where they were joined by the other men of their year, all of them rather shy but disposed to be friendly.

"Aren't you Trevannagh?" asked a fellow on the opposite side of the table.

"Yes. I seem to know your face," replied Douglas, who patently had no recollection of the other.

"I'm Atherton. I caught you in the deep—damn lucky catch—last year in the match at Lords."

"Oh, of course. Jolly good game, wasn't it?" And they indulged in cricket reminiscences for the rest of the meal.

Dick got into conversation with another Etonian, but Shannon remained silent, taking stock of the other freshmen. Even to his critical eyes they appeared, with a few exceptions, to be a fine collection. One of the exceptions was a spectacled youth on Dick's left: dirty, ill-mannered and unkempt, with a sugar-loaf curl and all his front teeth stopped, he was the bad product of a bad school. It subsequently transpired that he answered to the name of Rogers—that is, when anyone took the trouble to address him. Leaning across Dick, he spoke to Shannon.

"D'you know, I only just missed getting a scholarship at this place. Not that I want their dirty money, of course. Probably just as well; might not be in such pleasant company." He sniggered and looked across at the scholars' table.

To avoid him, Shannon took refuge in Dick's conversation with the Etonian, but after skilfully steering the talk from football, which bored him, to spiritualism, he again fell a victim to the spectacled one, who professed an ardent interest in the subject.

"I can't stand this any longer," he confided to Dick. "This chap's a sort of conversational bloodhound. He'd track one down any bypath of speech. I'll see you two in my rooms afterwards."

They found him unpacking a case of suggestive-looking bottles.

"Any drink you care for will be promptly provided," he announced.

"Drambuie," demanded Trevannagh, as one who states a test case.

"Right-o ; it's somewhere near the bottom. Help yourself to a Grand Marnier while I dig it out."

Coffee having been obtained from George and Dick's pipe having finally yielded to the blandishments of the ninth vesta, Shannon called for silence and outlined his programme. After awarding a prophetic cricket "blue" to Trevannagh the following summer, he suggested that until then they should eschew all forms of sport. Rowing, he pointed out, entailed early rising and chops for breakfast, while football under any civilized code was impossible after the Harrow game. Against joining the corps he was equally emphatic and declared that they could slake their patriotic thirst by re-reading Kipling. As regards work, it appeared that he and Dick were destined for the Law School, while Trevannagh was to exhibit a mild interest in history.

"It's not so bad," said the latter. "I've quite decided on it." He reflected. "And for my special subject, I shall take the Elizabethan period. Drake and Raleigh," he concluded enthusiastically.

"One should be grateful to the Elizabethan mariners," Shannon observed. "They made Newbolt possible."

"Well, that's that," said Dick. "Anything else before Duggie becomes incapable of speech?"

"Good lord," cried Shannon. "He's got through nearly half a bottle of Benedictine alone. How the devil do you manage it?"

"It's in the family," Trevannagh explained modestly. "That's why you always get such filthy drinks at our place. It's no use attempting to lay down wine with any Trevannaghs about."

"Before I carry the lad off to bed," said Dick, "I want to hear what you've been doing all the summer, Julian. You disappeared the day after we left Harrow, and devil a line have I had from you the whole time, save two picture post cards from the South of France. There's more in this than meets the eye. You used to be a splendid corre-

spondent and picture post cards were your abomination of desolation."

Shannon hung his head. "It's a long story," he said wearily, and then with obvious enjoyment settled down to tell it. "I went back to France, you know, after I left you, and spent a week or two in Paris with old Péronard. Well, while I was staying with him I had a letter from Georgette to say that she was touring the South of France with some small theatrical company, and she added by way of postscript that her aunt was dead. The latter fact didn't drive me to tears and a florist, but the former drove me south." He paused as though he had forgotten what had happened next. "Yes, I joined that theatrical company and played what the French fondly imagine to be typical Englishmen. Georgette was leading lady, so she fixed the business all right. I had six repertoire parts, ranging from an English marquis, one speech, three ejaculations and a cynical smile, down to a butler, a terrible rascal, who was always drunk. I think that was my greatest success. They all said I was splendid in the drunken scenes. And of course the more vile my accent, and the more hesitating my diction, the more English I appeared. We used to play for a week at each place and travel on Saturdays to the next one. It was hard work and all my spare time was monopolized by Georgette, so I couldn't write, and besides, I didn't want you chaps to know. Ah! Those dusty little towns in the sun, and the absurd railway journeys, and the love-making, and the futile little jealousies. All round Provence. Paint, powder and poverty. God, what a life!" He stared dreamily (and effectively) through the windows into the gathering dusk, and Trevannagh's "You're a rum devil, Julian, I wish I could have seen you," provoked no reply.

"But what the deuce made you go back to her?" asked Dick, "I thought you'd finished with the whole thing."

"So did I, but I had a chat with Péronard, who, by the

way, became quite reconciled to the liaison. You ought to have heard him. French is a polite language anyway, but Péronard fairly gilds the lily. He told me that he'd been to see the 'exquise Georgette'—he always calls her 'exquise'—and had found my photograph occupying the place of honour on her mantelpiece. He asked her to give it to him, as he hadn't got one of me—or perhaps he was trying to tease her. Anyhow she refused, and he offered to buy it for fifty francs. I shall never fetch as much again. But she wouldn't do it, although she was out of a job at the time and pretty nearly on her uppers. D'you remember, in *The School for Scandal*, how the uncle plumps for the nephew who won't sell his portrait. Well, I suppose this was rather the same sort of thing. Just vanity. And then, when she heard I was in Paris, she wrote, and I hadn't anything to do, so I went. *Voilà.*"

"What sort of a girl is she?" asked Dick.

"Well, she's got Montmartre written all over her, and I've seen her do the most atrocious things with a knife and fork. Also she's got a damnable temper. And yet—she's white. She's about the only woman I know with a masculine sense of honour."

"Eh?" said Trevannagh. "Don't want to be rude, old chap, but honour doesn't seem to have been her long suit."

"You're thinking of the feminine code, which contains only one article—chastity. A girl can break every promise under the sun, provided she retains her virginity. I read a novel the other day, one of the 'powerful' type. A man falls in love with a girl and can't marry her because he's got a lunatic wife. Idea borrowed from *Jane Eyre*, as you were about to remark, Dick. Well, the girl struggles between Love and Honour in a hundred pages and an attic. Finally Love triumphs and she promises the man that she will run away with him—to Italy, of course; they always elope to Italy in this type of book. They agree to catch the boat train at Victoria and the man makes all arrangements.

Then at the last moment chastity gains the victory. She decides not to go and remains in her attic, extracting much comfort from an oleograph of the Sistine Madonna and her Bible. And there's that wretched man left in the lurch on Victoria platform with two perfectly useless tickets for Bordighera. And the author pats the girl on the back in an eloquent passage, containing two unacknowledged quotations from Meredith—just because she broke her promise. Now a man would have paid his debt whatever it cost him. That's what I mean by a masculine sense of honour."

"Oh, shut up Julian," said Trevannagh, yawning, "I suppose you've got to go on talking, but for the Lord's sake talk about something interesting."

"Spiritualism, for example?" Shannon suggested.

"I heard you drivelling away about it in hall," said Dick. "It's all rubbish, isn't it?"

"No, there's something in it. A tremendous lot of fraud, of course, but every creed has its false prophets. Still, I'm convinced that it's not all a trick. We must try a séance here one night."

"Don't start talking spooks," Trevannagh interrupted. "I'm getting sleepy and I shall have nightmare. Besides, you're both tight," he added offensively.

"I like that. We've had about one to your five."

"There's none so blind as those that won't drink."

"Well, you can go to sleep if you don't want to listen. Julian and I are going to discuss spiritualism, which means that Julian's going to talk and I'm going to listen," Dick explained.

"I'm far too frightened to sleep with all this witchcraft going on. Fire away, Julian, let's hear this yarn of yours."

"It's not much of a story, and it has the demerit of being true—which no good story should be. Still, here it is, for what it's worth. Jacques Péronard, the fellow I lived with in Paris, had a brother, Etienne, who was London corre-

spondent to one of the big French dailies. Etienne was our original friend, and it was through him that we got to know Jacques. In fact Etienne was my father's oldest pal and as a kiddie I worshipped him. He was always Uncle Etienne to me, and I think he was as fond of me as I was of him. The two brothers were Alsatian by birth, and had gone into voluntary exile after '71. Their father was killed in the war and their mother didn't long survive him. In consequence Etienne in his writings was a bitter foe of Germany and a staunch upholder of the *entente cordiale*. Poor chap, he had a positive mania for discovering German plots against France and England; the number of spy organizations and secret societies that he found would have kept Oppenheim and Le Queux busy for the rest of their lives.

"Well, about three years ago, the poor fellow died under very tragic circumstances. He had been dining with us and, as usual, was full of some new plot he had discovered. 'This time it is not a mare's nest, my dear Charles,' he kept saying to the governor, who always used to laugh at his spy yarns. A 'mare's nest' was one of his pet English colloquialisms. He left us in excellent spirits, convinced that he was going to save Europe from some awful catastrophe. That was the last time we saw him alive. The next morning his body was discovered in an unfrequented little street in Soho. He had been run over by some heavy vehicle, probably a dray, and was horribly mangled. There was no clue of any description, and at the inquest—of course there was an inquest and we had to attend—the jury returned a verdict of accidental death. There was some suggestion that he had been the worse for drink when he left us, which was absolutely untrue."

He paused and lit a cigarette.

"You never told us a word about this before," said Dick.

"It was an absolute nightmare to me at the time and I

didn't want to discuss it with anyone—not even the guv'nor. I only talk of it to-night, because it had an amazing and rather horrible sequel. Jacques had always been keen on spiritualism and, while I was staying with him in Paris, he fixed up a séance with a new medium, who had gained a great reputation over there. He gave a false name, of course, and I went with him to take notes if anything interesting happened. The medium was a woman of very low class and spoke a patois which I found very difficult to understand. Without asking any questions, she went under control—rather an uncanny business, more like an epileptic seizure than anything else. Then she began to mutter incoherently, but after a bit the voice became distinct, and the odd part of it was that it wasn't her voice at all. It was of quite a different pitch and she spoke with a perfect Parisian accent. If it was a trick, it was an astoundingly clever one. The voice tried to establish the fact that it really was in touch with Etienne; in fact, it even spelt out the name, though I admit that that may have been due to thought-transference. Then followed a lot of utter nonsense: medium-padding, vague descriptions of places that we were asked to identify that both of us were supposed to know. They might have been anywhere. Then she began to mutter again and I thought she was coming round. The muttering died away and she was silent for perhaps thirty seconds. Her lips seemed trying to frame some words, but the task seemed too much for her. And then the most amazing thing happened. A voice issued from her lips, but it was neither her own voice nor the voice of the 'control.' It was the voice of Etienne. I swear to you that it was the voice of Etienne. He spoke in English with just that soupçon of a foreign accent that made his conversation so fascinating, and though he only said two sentences, the identity of the speaker was unmistakable."

Shannon paused dramatically and seemed lost among the memories which he had evoked.

"Well, what did he say?" asked Trevannagh breathlessly.

"I was right after all, Julian. Tell Charles that that time it was not a mare's nest."

There was silence for a minute and then Dick said: "That's a damn queer story of yours, Julian."

"Yes, and the queerest part of it is that it's true, absolutely true."

"Look here, you know," said Trevannagh, with sudden gravity, "that proves something, then. There must be an after-life. Suppose for example, that you and I got done in, Julian, we could still talk to Dick through a medium?"

"Perhaps," replied Shannon. "I'm not drawing inferences; I'm making a statement to support my theory that there's something genuine in spiritualism. I don't know how far it's possible to converse with any particular person on the other side. But why suggest a case like that? You'll probably die of drink at about forty-five, but I intend to outlive Dick by several years."

"It would be inartistic to pick your story to pieces to-night," said Dick. "So I'm for bed. We've spent our first evening at Oxford, discussing women and spiritualism. Is that an omen?"

Shannon shrugged his shoulders. "And Duggie wants himself and me to die in order that we can chat to you through a medium. Is that a prophecy?"

"I suppose I ought to say something snappy here," said Trevannagh. "But I'm too sleepy to think of anything. Come on, Dick. Good night, Julian."

They descended the stairs together and, in spite of Trevannagh's protest, Dick followed him into his room. The curtains were undrawn and through the window he could see the quadrangle bathed in moonlight. Save for a couple of windows opposite, where a lamp still glowed, the whole college was in darkness. Silver, grey and black lay the shadows on the old stone.

"So this is Oxford," said Dick.

"If you want to write a sonnet, go and do it in your own room. I could sleep the sleep of the dead to-night and no medium would ever wake me up to talk to you."

Dick laughed. "You're tight, that's what you are, my son. Go to bed and sleep it off."

CHAPTER IV

OXFORD does not possess a routine. Within certain wide limits one may do just what one pleases, and it is not so much a matter of conforming to a universal scheme as of shaping one's own course with the minimum amount of friction. Tradition forbids the use of a walking-stick and has reserved all forms of head-gear for state occasions only, but is otherwise silent upon the matter of clothes—which is very pleasant after the sartorial slavery of a school. Oxford is like a jig-saw puzzle : the most odd and irrelevant-looking pieces fit somehow into the general pattern.

Dick found this extension of his franchise novel and exhilarating ; Shannon discounted it as rather irksome and qualified after the complete liberty of Paris ; Trevannagh hardly noticed it. They were too exclusive to be really popular, while Shannon's affectations were not generally appreciated, but each found in the others all the companionship he needed, and as the Law Preliminary is the gateway to the School of History as well as to the School of Jurisprudence, Trevannagh, though bound for another destination, was able to make the first stage of his journey with his friends. The trio, indeed, would have been absolutely self-contained had it not been for the indisputable fact that it takes four to make up a game of Bridge.

A few days after their arrival, they were sipping their after-dinner coffee in Shannon's room, when George, the scout, entered.

"Baron von Ecke's compliments and will you gentlemen breakfast with him to-morrow?"

"What time?" asked Trevannagh uneasily.

"Nine-fifteen, sir."

Trevannagh brightened. "We may as well: in fact, I suppose it would be rude to refuse. Thank Baron von Ecke and tell him we'll be with him at nine-fifteen."

Breakfast is the social meal of Oxford. Save on special occasions, lunch is apt to be a bread-and-butter picnic, while tea is essentially a feminine institution and the average man perspires freely at the mere mention of a tea-party.

Punctually at nine-fifteen they assembled in Shannon's room, and crossing the neutral territory of the landing, entered German soil. Von Ecke, a handsome, well-built fellow, some three years Dick's senior, might at first glance have passed for an Englishman. Fair, with a frank good-humoured face, he seemed to have sprung from the same stock as Trevannagh. He spoke English rather formally but almost without accent.

"I thought that I ought to get to know you, as we are all on the same staircase," he said by way of greeting. "Breakfast is quite prepared, so I suggest that we should at once begin."

He proved an excellent host and showed none of the foreign stiffness that they had feared.

"What part of Germany do you come from?" Dick asked.

"I am of Berlin, but save for the summer of this year, I have spent the whole of the last two years in England, one up here and one in travelling round your country."

"And how do you like England?"

"Immensely. I find the scenery very beautiful and the people delightful." He gave them a nod and a smile to appropriate the compliment.

"You ought to become naturalized," suggested Trevannagh, but Von Ecke shook his head.

"Once a German, always a German," he said, "besides, your country is kinder to foreigners than to its own subjects."

Shannon laughed. "You must give me the chance of proving that by coming to see me in my room. I promise you that the foreigner shall have the best seat and we'll make these two British subjects sit on the floor."

"Mr. Shannon at home. Cards and conversation every evening from 8.30 onwards," Dick amended. "By the way, d'you play Bridge?"

"Certainly. I have been badly bitten by the game," Von Ecke confessed, obviously rather proud of his command of colloquial English.

"Far too good a fellow to be a German," was Trevannagh's verdict as they left.

"You're not merely insular, Duggie, you're parochial," said Shannon.

The more intimate they became with Von Ecke, the more they liked him, and almost every evening he would drop in to make up a four at Bridge, or to combat, with immense seriousness, Shannon's heretical philosophy.

At the end of their second fortnight, the ceremony known as "Fresher's wine" took place. It is the custom of the men of the third year to entertain the Freshmen to dessert and wine in the Junior Common room, when the maxim *in vino veritas* is supposed to lay bare the merits and defects of the first year.

The proceedings started in an orderly fashion and they drank to the health of Harrow with the other old Harrovians present. But this decorum was not to the taste of the more riotous souls who, mixing all the wine and spirits in one large bowl, insisted upon every one drinking a bumper to the College. The effects of this beverage were immediate and apparent. Tongues and waistcoat buttons were

loosened, a dance was started and the proposal of a bicycle race round the "quad" was followed by a rush to secure mounts from the porter's lodge. Dick, who was feeling very ill, seized the chance offered by this diversion and departed; his last recollection of the scene was of Trevannagh, still perfectly sober, restraining Rogers from running amok with a whisky-bottle and of Shannon standing on a chair and delivering an impassioned sermon upon the text "Oxford is the comb of lost horses."

They met at breakfast the next morning in Dick's rooms.

"How d'you feel?" asked Trevannagh.

"Rather piano," Dick confessed. "I couldn't look an egg in the face this morning, so I've ordered fish all round."

"Right. Hullo, here's Julian. Julian, you were in a beastly condition last night."

Shannon shook his head mournfully, but said nothing.

"If that was wine and song last night, I think they're much over-rated vices," Dick declared. "If woman is no better, I shall turn hermit."

"Oh, by the way," said Trevannagh, "last night that Etonian chap, Atherton, gave me a couple of seats for the show at the theatre. He can't go himself for some reason or other. I'll try and get another pew; it's a musical comedy, *The Girl in the Grotto*."

"Not for me," said Shannon, "I'm going to try and rebuild the fortunes of the old house at sixpenny auction."

"Well, you'll come, Dick?"

"Yes, rather."

The Girl in the Grotto probably deserved its success as much as any of the score of musical comedies then touring the provinces. The lady who inhabited this damp abode evoked much choral sympathy from the other female members of the cast until she was finally rescued in the last act by a fat and throaty tenor.

But Dick and Trevannagh, seated in the front row of the stalls, did not attempt to follow what little plot there was.

"By Gad, isn't she a stunner," exclaimed the latter, as the heroine finished her entrance song.

"Which?" asked Dick, who was manifesting considerable interest in one of the chorus.

"Why, Eloise," he referred to his programme. "Er—Betty Barrington."

"Yes. 'Not uncomely,' as old Julian would say. But what about the girl who's playing the part of her maid? Here, give us the programme. Babette Guillonvare. I suppose she really is French, that accent's too good to be put on."

"Yes, she's not bad either."

A few minutes later the curtain fell on the first act and they sauntered outside to smoke a cigarette.

"Look here, Dickie," said Trevannagh. "Let's ask those two girls to come to lunch. What d'you think?"

In a tobacconist's near by, Trevannagh compiled his invitation. "Dear Miss Barrington," he wrote. "Would you and Miss Guillonvare do us the honour of lunching with us to-morrow? Would you also bring another lady, as we have a friend?"

"That'll do, won't it? Sign, please!"

Dick signed. "Better add a postscript to say that we're in the third and fourth seats from the right in the front row."

"Yes, I'll put that in. And I've never said where we'll meet them. Better make it outside the theatre at half-past twelve. Damn! It's all postscript now. I'd better start again."

At the third essay the letter was passed with honours and Trevannagh handed it with half a crown to one of the attendants.

As soon as the curtain went up on the second act it was clear that their note had reached its destination. Miss Barrington gave them a dazzling smile and maintained their ardour with an occasional glance. But Miss Guillonvare would not let them alone. She sang at them, she

smiled at them, she shook her curls at them, until the pit was moved to expostulatory cries. "Behave, Babette," they yelled.

Dick felt embarrassed, and when the attendant with ostentatious secrecy handed him a note, he was driven to take blushing refuge behind his programme.

"Delighted. Meet you outside here at twelve-thirty.—B.B.," ran the message.

* * * * *

At breakfast the next morning there was but one topic.

"I think we'd better leave the question of food entirely in your hands, Julian," said Trevannagh. "Oh, George," as the scout entered. "We're expecting three ladies to lunch. We'd better have it in Mr. Goodall's rooms, so as to avoid the conversation of the quad, which might offend their delicate ears."

"Very good, sir."

"What about wine?" asked Dick. "D'you think fiz is indicated?"

"Undoubtedly," Shannon replied. "As far as the stage is concerned, there is no other wine."

Dick and Trevannagh were at the rendezvous a good twenty minutes before the appointed time; Shannon had refused to accompany them on the ground that he would be of more use in supervising the luncheon arrangements.

"I'll toss you, who takes Julian's girl in his cab," Trevannagh offered.

"Right," said Dick, and lost.

"Well, you'll have to take her, then. We may as well get a couple of hansoms now, it's just on time."

When the ladies arrived, only ten minutes late, Dick and Trevannagh were relieved to find that they looked almost as young off the stage as on it and were both undeniably pretty. But they were not to escape without a shock, and this was provided by the "friend" who had been brought for Shannon. She was tall and plump and seemed

to do everything in a large manner, acting upon generous but embarrassing impulses. How she had managed to squeeze her ample figure into a normal-sized musquash coat, obviously borrowed for the occasion, is a subject demanding feminine treatment, and Dick, thinking of the colours that might lie beneath, shuddered.

"Don't tell me which of you is which," Miss Barrington admonished. "I'm going to guess." She turned to Dick. "I believe you're Mr. Goodall."

"Correct," Dick admitted and felt uneasily that he would be paired off with her instead of with Babette. Babette, however, ordered otherwise.

"I cannot pronounce the other gentleman's name, but yours is so easy. Good-all. And your *petit nom*?"

"Dick," he said, feeling that this was the supreme moment of his life.

"Deek : Deekie—that also is easy," she said, and slipped her arm through his.

"If I don't have any more trouble with you than in pronouncing your name, I shan't mind," Miss Barrington declared to Trevannagh.

Meanwhile the third lady had been surrounding the group with an aura of joviality. She now stepped forward and was introduced as Miss Maudie Adams.

"I see you haven't brought a boy for me," she said coyly. "Just say the word and I'll vanish. I'm not one to spoil sport, y'know."

Before Dick could invent a plausible illness for Shannon, Trevannagh blundered in.

"Oh, he's waiting for you at the college. Quite O.K. and all that. Too busy to come up here."

"That's all right, then." And she became even brighter than before.

"Excuse us just one minute," said Miss Barrington. "We must see if there are any letters for us at the theatre."

Left alone for the moment, Dick turned to Trevannagh.

"I say, we're a pair of lucky devils."

"Yes, I know, but what about poor old Julian?"

"She's a terror, isn't she? Looks like an allegorical picture of noise."

The ladies reappeared and Trevannagh, appropriating Miss Barrington, drove off.

It is patent to anyone that three people cannot sit with dignity in a hansom cab. Especially is this the case when one of the trio boasts a figure like Miss Adams'. Though outwardly calm, Dick was keenly aware of the delicacy of the situation, but Babette faced it without any qualms.

"You get in, Maudie, and now you get in, Deek," she ordered, "and now I squeeze myself in—so." Whereupon she snuggled down comfortably upon Dick's knee.

Disembarkation at the college gates was an embarrassing business, but it was carried through without untoward incident.

"Can't find Julian anywhere," cried Trevannagh, as Dick, with a sigh of relief, ushered his charges into his room.

"I love the name of Julian," said Miss Adams sentimentally. "Is he shy or doesn't he want to meet me?"

"Oh, you mustn't think that," said Trevannagh hastily. "I know he's awfully keen to meet you."

"How can he be when he's never seen me?"

Trevannagh could find no answer to this, but the situation was saved by the arrival of Shannon, who sauntered in carelessly, as though he had forgotten all about the party. It says a good deal for his nerves that he did not blench upon being introduced to Miss Adams.

"You don't mind if I call you Julian?" she asked. "It's one of my favourite names and you look just like a Julian. In return, I'll let you call me Maudie."

It was significant that Babette had been frankly Babette from the first, that Miss Adams had become Maudie upon impulse, but that Miss Barrington retained her dignity and her surname.

Lunch was rather an embarrassing meal. Miss Barrington was gracious but reserved, while Shannon seized the chance of airing his French to Babette, whose English was somewhat unreliable. Dick and Trevannagh being too shy to say much, the conversation was dominated by Miss Adams, who indulged in Thespian reminiscences, full of unconvincing dialogue. It had been decided to adjourn to Shannon's room for coffee and, as they passed Trevannagh's door, the "Hon." in front of his name caught Miss Barrington's eye.

"He's the son of a lord," Dick heard her whisper reverentially to Babette, who shrugged her shoulders with true republican independence.

Shannon's room provoked a chorus of approval from the girls.

"I've never *seen* anything so artistic," declared Miss Adams, who invariably spoke in italics. "Just compare these rooms with ours, Betty."

"I know," Shannon grinned. "Five rubber plants under glass and an engraving of Queen Victoria."

Meanwhile Babette had been wandering round the room inspecting the pictures. "This is a French girl, no?" she asked, pointing to the drawing of Georgette. Shannon nodded.

"She is a very great friend of yours?"

"Yes."

This was too much for Miss Adams, who sighed deeply and shook her head at him.

"I'm afraid you're a terrible Don Quixote," she said, and Dick was reminded irresistibly of his mother.

A desire on the part of Dick and Trevannagh to split the conversation up into duologue was countered by a fear that they would be unable to find anything to say, but no one could retain his bashfulness for long against the noisy joviality of Miss Adams, and by the time that tea arrived, they were all apparently on the best of terms.

Shannon was in his happiest vein, but Dick could not help noticing that his sarcastic humour was not at all to the taste of Miss Barrington, who seemed to resent his air of patronage. Soon after five o'clock she rose.

"I think we ought to be getting back now," she announced, "we've got to work up some new business for the show to-night and there'll be an awful row if we're not there."

"Not being a star, there's no reason why I should hurry," said Miss Adams, as one who discovers the privilege of obscurity. "I'm going to have another cup of tea and Julian will bring me along later." She waved a muffin roguishly at her friends by way of adieu, and Shannon, after one despairing glance, resigned himself to his fate.

"Ah, but my cloak," cried Babette as they reached the quadrangle, "I think I leaved him in your room, Deek."

Mounting the stairs again, they retrieved the missing garment. Dick held it out for her and Babette, slipping her arms into the sleeves, wriggled round adroitly so that her face was only a few inches from his. She smiled invitingly and he kissed her, at first experimentally and then passionately. For a minute or two they stood thus, and then Babette laughed.

"You silly boy. Come along or I shall be late."

In the cab, Dick laid before her a detailed scheme for the whole week. They were to lunch in turn at each of the hotels in Oxford and to distribute their patronage among the various tea-shops, while every evening was to find him in the same stall at the theatre.

"Oh, you English: you are funny," she said, laughing at his impetuosity.

"Funny?" Dick snorted.

"Yes. And—also rather nice. *A demain.*"

Dick returned to college in a state of amorous intoxication and found Trevannagh waiting for him in his rooms.

A few minutes later they were joined by Shannon, who came in mopping his brow with a large yellow silk handkerchief.

"Mix me a strong whisky," he begged in a weak voice.

"Afraid you've had a rotten day."

"You'll have to go through it again to-morrow," said Dick. "That is if you can stand it."

"Oh, it's very good for me. Besides my love for thee is great, passing the hate of women."

"Well, at any rate we haven't done badly for ourselves, have we?" asked Dick.

"That's what I came to talk to you about." He finished his drink. "Hearken, my sons, unto the words of the Prophet Julian, which he spoke concerning the daughters of men. Give thanks, Richard, for verily thou art in clover. For she is comely, and is it not plain that she taketh pleasure in thee? As to you, Duggie, my lad, I should advise you to be careful."

"I don't want any of your cheap cynicism, Julian. She's a damn pretty girl, isn't she?"

"My dear Duggie, therein lies the trouble. It is the elemental virtue of man to be brave and of woman to be beautiful. In order to display his courage, a man is given strength, and in order to make the most of her beauty, a woman is endowed with a certain low cunning. It is perhaps needless to add that strength is no match for low cunning."

"Oh, shut up, Julian. You talk like a soured bachelor in the third act of a drawing-room comedy," said Dick.

"Well, perhaps hardly drawing-room. I believe it's diluted Bernard Shaw."

In the pause that followed, Trevannagh was observed to be wrestling with epigram.

"Shavian water—and only lukewarm at that," he said.

Shannon laughed. "Not bad for you, Duggie. But

I mean what I say about Queen Elizabeth. By all means, be bold, be bold, but don't be bowled over."

To Dick and Trevannagh, the week during which *The Girl in the Grotto* remained at Oxford was invested with the purest spirit of romance, for neither of them had the experience for comparison and criticism. The programme mooted the first day was strictly carried out, and even Shannon's defection failed to mar their pleasure. After two days of Miss Adams' society, he had been afflicted with a bad cold, which, when she offered to visit him, developed into a remarkably infectious attack of influenza. To him the other two brought a daily bulletin of their progress, receiving in return a few hints on the proper handling of the matter and much caustic comment. While retaining his distrust of Miss Barrington, though, after one or two quarrels, he never alluded to it in Trevannagh's presence, he approved Dick's flirtation with Babette.

But in the pursuit of this aim, his encouragement counted for little. Unchecked by convention, the affair progressed with considerable speed, and the secrecy needed to elude the proctorial eye lent it an added spice. It is unnecessary to follow too intimately the relations between Dick and Babette: the process is familiar to most men, and any woman to whom it is unknown may treasure her ignorance.

That the whole affair was commonplace, was even rather sordid, did not occur to him. Hitherto his emotional experiences had consisted of stolen kisses from flappers and of hopeless passions for women ten years older than himself. But this was something satisfying, full-blooded. Moreover, he felt himself to be the very devil of a fellow. . . .

Even the best of weeks has its Sunday. Wearing hats and their best clothes, as befitted the solemnity of the occasion, Dick and Trevannagh were on the platform to see the company off. It was essentially a ridiculous business. The leading comedian, who seemed to be in charge of the party, continually interrupted their more

tender passages with officious advice and offers of cigars, of which he carried an ostentatious row in his waistcoat pocket. Then there were three rather unpleasant men from Keble, who lurked behind large pipes and exchanged lewd winks with the chorus. Finally there was Miss Adams, whose voice and presence dominated the whole station. She seemed to have consoled herself for the loss of Shannon with a rather undersized youth, who answered to a series of insulting nicknames, of which "Pimples" seemed to be the most apposite. The guard's whistle came as a positive relief.

"Good-bye," shouted Trevannagh. "I'll write you in a day or so, and we'll be up the week after next to see you at Nottingham."

"You see, Deekie, it is only *au revoir*," cried Babette. And then above the increasing rumble of the wheels rose the voice of Miss Adams. "Don't forget me, Scrubbs."

The pair walked back to college rather sadly, until Dick broke a long silence.

"Don't let's behave like a couple of sentimental idiots. We're sure to see them again some time, and when we do, Babette's promised me——" He broke off abruptly. "What's this idea of yours about Nottingham?"

Trevannagh became almost animated.

"I've had a brain-wave. A cousin of mine has got a car he wants to get rid of—a thirty-forty Itala with a torpedo-body—a pretty sound bus, let me tell you. He's only asking three hundred and fifty for it, and as I've got a little spare cash, I'm going to buy it. I'll make him run it up here some time this week—in fact, I wrote to him last night. We'll go up to Nottingham in her the week after next and see them."

"Duggie, I take off my hat to you—lucky I happen to be wearing one."

They found Shannon talking to Von Eeke in the college porch. He surveyed their clothes with disgust.

"You look like townees who are trying to look like undergraduates," he sneered. "Well, are you going to forsake the fat pastures of love and return to the fold of friendship?"

"Oh, go to—er—Queen's," said Trevannagh, and pushed him down the steps in that direction.

And there, indeed, the matter should have ended. But the theatrical manager who had sent the *Girl in the Grotto* to Oxford, having attempted the rôle of Nemesis for the first time, seemed loth to abandon the part. The comedy moved in a geometrical process and, taking Oxford as its centre, described a circle with a radius of forty miles. The car arrived and was put into instant commission, and as forty miles out and back was an ideal run, Dick and Trevannagh found the course of true love running as smoothly as good springing and pneumatic tyres could make it. Upon these expeditions Shannon never accompanied them. His continual prophecies of ultimate complications irked them, until the matter as a topic of triple discussion was dropped. But Climax waited yet awhile in the green-room.

* * * * *

One evening the three friends were having their after-dinner coffee in Shannon's room, when the host suddenly announced that he was going out.

"But I've asked some of the lads round to play poker," Dick objected.

"Can't help it. I've got to go."

"Why?"

"A pal of mine in Magdalen has got hold of a well-known medium, who happens to be staying in Oxford, and we're going to have a pukka séance."

"Confound your spirits!" cried Trevannagh. "They're not only driving you dippy, but they're taking up all your time."

"Isn't it worth while spending time to solve the riddle

of eternity?" Shannon retorted. "I can't think why you chaps aren't more interested in it."

They had made several attempts at table-turning with varying success, but nothing of any real importance had eventuated, and though they were unwilling to dismiss the whole subject as a hoax, the haphazard messages which they had received had been a matter for mirth rather than for serious speculation. There had been one delightful incident, when the table, actuated, according to Shannon, by the spirit of his friend Etienne, had warned them of a German plot, and Von Ecke, who was present, had taken the whole thing quite seriously and, to hide his embarrassment, had delivered a long discourse on the possibility of the survival of prejudice after death. By professing, in his letters, an honest doubt about spiritualism, Dick had succeeded in shocking his mother, and he now never received even a post card from her without some reference to the Witch of Endor.

"Of all the childish enthusiasms which you affect, Julian," Trevannagh began, but Shannon cut him short.

"You'd better all come along."

"No fear," said Dick. "Give us a full house and you can keep your haunted ones."

The game of poker broke up about half-past eleven, and Dick and Trevannagh went round as usual to Shannon's room for their "night-cap." But it was not until a few minutes before twelve that the latter returned, and it was at once evident that he was labouring under some extraordinary excitement. His face was deathly pale and his eyes were dilated, like those of a frightened child awaking from nightmare.

"Hullo, Julian! You look queer," said Trevannagh. "D'you want a drink or have you had too much already?" And then with rising apprehension: "Good Lord, man, what the devil's the matter with you?"

"I've had a beastly experience—a beastly experience,"

said Shannon in a quick dry voice and, as he spoke, he jerked out his hands, with a nervous movement, an unpleasant caricature of the elaborate foreign gestures which he normally affected. "It was extraordinary. We tried a materialization. There were only six of us in the room to start with, but somehow there was an intolerable sense of overcrowding. And then, God knows what happened. It was monstrous, horrible." He shuddered. "I'm frightened," he said, upon a note of discovery.

The other two looked at him, perplexed and uncomfortable.

"You'd better tell us all about it," Trevannagh suggested.

"No. You wouldn't believe me. And, besides, there are other reasons."

"What the deuce——" Dick began and then, "Look here, old chap. Try and forget the whole thing. I've never in my life seen anyone in such a state. We'll discuss it to-morrow, if you like, but give it a rest for to-night. You're all on edge."

Though both were immensely curious to hear his story, they knew that, once he had made up his mind not to tell them, it would be useless to press him. Trevannagh played up manfully.

"If that's your way of spending an evening, Julian, I prefer ours—Maudie an' all."

"Gather ye rose-buds while ye may," retorted Shannon with a smile. "But I intend to pluck the fruit from the Tree of Knowledge."

"Don't be a damn fool, Julian," said Dick, "you'll go mad if you carry on with this business."

"I'll make a bargain with you. I'm going to follow up this thing, but I promise you that I won't try any more materializations. Good Lord, you don't seem to appreciate the tremendous issues at stake. I don't believe in an after-life as preached by the orthodox religions. There was a door to which I found no key! Well, I

intend to find that key. I must know, before I die." He rose and began to walk about excitedly—a totally different being from the cynical philosopher to whom they were accustomed.

"Steady, Julian," said Trevannagh, "I've only got two maxims in life, but they're at your service. When in doubt, have a drink. When in grave doubt, go to bed!"

"Duggie's right, Julian. Give it up. You'll go off your head and shoot yourself, if you don't."

"Suicide whilst temporarily insane. Who knows that it isn't the highest form of sanity, supposing one knows what lies beyond. It's certainly the sanest act for some people to commit." The excitement died out of his voice. "As for giving it up, you didn't give up Betty when I asked you to, so why should I abandon this?"

"Don't make damned silly comparisons: do as Duggie says, have another drink and go to bed." Dick became masterful. "We'll give you five minutes to get between the sheets, and if you aren't there by then, we'll fall upon you and forcibly put you there."

To his surprise, Shannon complied. "Perhaps you're right, Dick. I've had a beastly experience to-night, and I don't think any of us quite know what we're talking about. I don't suppose you'll ever see me in this state again. Let's drop the subject and talk about something else."

They discussed other matters until Shannon had undressed and got into bed, but as they bade him "good night," they heard him mutter to himself: "I must know—I must know—before I die."

CHAPTER V

TO the events of that evening none of them ever again referred, and spiritualism became for Shannon what Miss Barrington was for Trevannagh—a personal idiosyncrasy and no fit subject for jest or discussion. That he continued his investigations the others guessed, for he was frequently absent from college of an evening and consorted with an Indian in Balliol who was said to possess extraordinary occult powers. But of the success or failure of these experiments Shannon gave no sign and his friends forbore to question him.

This secrecy in no wise changed the quality of their comradeship, and Christmas vacation and Easter term slipped by serenely, the prospect of schools in the summer being the only cloud on the horizon. Towards the end of the Easter term Shannon made a suggestion.

“My guv’nor’s away for a few days, so why don’t you two come and stay with me until he comes back? Just two or three days—and we’ll have great fun.”

They accepted his invitation and Dick wrote a carefully-worded letter to his mother to that effect. He was aware that she regarded with jealousy the great influence exercised over him by Shannon and Trevannagh: she thought that not merely a man’s best friend, but his only friend, should be his mother. But in her reply she made no reference to this jealousy and cast no reproaches. She was one of those women who prefer to suffer in a silence broken only by explanatory sighs and sniffs.

Shannon's father lived at Chelsea in a sequestered old house overlooking the river. The seclusion of it appealed to Dick immensely.

"One could really work here," he said, as Shannon was showing him over the library.

"Um. 'All the sweet serenity of books.' We'll come here, when we really do want to do some reading. I suppose we shall have to do a certain amount of work for our finals."

"It's a long road before we reach that turning," said Trevannagh. "Meanwhile let's eat, drink and be merry. What's the programme for to-night?"

"I suggest that each of us acts as host in turn. You take this evening, Duggie; Dick can squander money on us to-morrow and I'll take you two children out for a treat the day after."

"It's quite apparent to me," said Dick, "that Julian has thought out some wonderful entertainment for us just to make our efforts look ridiculous. Still I suppose we'd better humour him."

Trevannagh did not rise above a dinner at the Carlton, a musical comedy and supper at the Savoy. To answer this challenge Dick racked his brains for something novel and finally rushed to the opposite extreme by taking them to a suburban restaurant, a provincial music hall and supper at a coffee-stall. Of the two evenings it was far the more enjoyable. The people in the restaurant provided an excellent target for Shannon's wit and two melodramatic turns at the music hall sent them into paroxysms of mirth; nor was their enjoyment of the supper in any way marred by a brawl with a couple of drunken navvies, who persisted in regarding them as responsible for the high price of beer. The whole affair was voted a great success and was placed on their repertory for future performances.

On the third evening Shannon announced that he was going to give them dinner at a small French restaurant,

then drop in at the Brasserie Latine for coffee and liqueurs and finish up the evening at a night club.

Dick was moved to epigram. "Night clubs generally begin in Soho and end in Bow Street."

"Oh, you mustn't start by overestimating the glamour of the place. You'll probably find it very dull."

"What's the appropriate garb for this show?" asked Trevannagh. "Glad rags or simply rags?"

"Try and make yourself look as unusual as you can, and you'll pass without comment," Shannon advised.

The restaurant to which he took them stood in a narrow turning off Wardour Street and rejoiced in the name of the Café du Midi. M. le Patron, though a great traveller, had left his heart in Southern France and would invariably wind up his tales of the many cities of Europe which he had visited, by declaring that no thoroughfare in the world could for a moment compare with the 'Cannebierre.' He was a plump, jovial little fellow and seemed incapable of confining himself to one language at a time. He would begin a sentence in English, halt for a word, lapse into French and finally drift away into Polish or Italian.

The atmosphere was that of a family party rather than a restaurant and conversation was maintained between adjacent tables. Introduction was less a matter of formality than of inclination and Dick soon found himself involved in a polite dispute with a gentleman at the next table over the rival merits of Beaune and Chianti. The meal finished, they would have preferred to linger, but Shannon was inexorable.

"You'll either have coffee at the Brasserie or you'll get none at all," he said. "If you've never been there before, you're sure to like it. It isn't one of those places where Brixton looks at Balham and mistakes it for Bohemia. You really do meet interesting people there."

The Brasserie Latine stands between Piccadilly Circus

and Leicester Square, but its popularity depends less on its situation than on the quality of its clientele. Rumour has it that three well-known painters, several sculptors, and quite a number of minor poets are on the pay-roll of the management. They give to the Brasserie its distinctive *cachet* and it is to see them that the public comes. The Brasserie Latine provides more new intellectual movements and worse wine than any other restaurant in London. Furnished in the continental fashion with little marble-topped tables, it is the last stronghold of the domino player and the favourite pulpit of the philosopher. Though the place was crowded, they were lucky enough to secure a table and Shannon, in the character of showman, began to point out the celebrities.

“ That fat chap over there, holding his court, is Prestwick the Sculptor, and the prosperous-looking fellow next him is Higgins, a *nouveau riche* patron of *nouveau art*. He’s one of those intensely hospitable people who hate to see you smoking only one of his cigars at a time : hence the deference paid to his artistic criticism. The rather pretty girl with them is Anita ; nobody can ever remember her surname, as she is always getting divorced and remarried. I don’t know the people at the next table ; I expect they’re dwellers from beyond Jordan. That chap in the corner is Isaacs, one of our great Imperialists, who send the same letter to the jingo press every Saturday. ‘ Dear Sir, Delenda est Germania, Yours, etc.’ He’s one of those strong silent men who have made England what it isn’t. The woman next to him is Sybil Carrington, who painted that astonishing picture of Mary Magdalene heading a suffragette procession.”

At this moment they noticed a man threading his way towards their table. That he had once been a fine-looking fellow might after careful inspection be divined, but the cause of his downfall was manifest to every one, and indeed, in talking of his failures, he showed a certain pride in giving

the reason for them. Brandy was on his lips almost as often as it was down his throat.

"This a pal of yours, Julian?" asked Dick.

"Yes, chap called Praed. Rather an amusing card, but quite futile."

"I trust you won't think it impertinent of me, gentlemen," said the stranger courteously, "if I sit at your table."

"Not at all," said Dick. "Have a drink."

"Thank you. I will take a brandy."

"I suppose we'd better introduce ourselves," Trevannagh began. "I'm——"

"No, no," interrupted Praed, "I do not wish to know your names: that would spoil it. I want to know what you are—your egos. Now I—I am a leaf upon the Tree of the Knowledge of Evil. I once aspired to become a branch, but——" he paused. "'Brandy,'" he added with a large explanatory gesture.

Having received a kick from Trevannagh, Dick burst out laughing. Praed regarded him without hostility.

"I really ought to apologize to you for being drunk," he said. "All I can urge in my own defence is that I am not offensively drunk. Drink is like a man with two sons—one, legitimate and the rightful heir, is good humour. But he has also a bastard child—quarrelsomeness. I claim that my drunkenness is the issue of lawful wedlock."

Dick was overwhelmed by this complex metaphor. "Oh, of course. I apologize for laughing. Let's have another drink all round. They're on you, Duggie."

"Garçon, quatre fines," shouted Praed in his deep rich voice.

"I don't think I ever come here without seeing you," said Shannon. "I suppose you know every one in the place."

"Every one knows me," Praed corrected. "Yes and I know most of them. I have the merit of being despicable,

so none of them are jealous of me. I am the recipient of a thousand confidences. These women all tell me their love affairs—most complicated, some of them. I have been the first, and often the only auditor of half a dozen epics. Painters show me their pictures naked before they clothe them in colour. I am the wet-nurse of art."

"Hardly the best diet for a wet-nurse—brandy; is it?" asked Dick.

"Alcohol has conceived more art than you wot of," rejoined the other impressively, knocking over his glass by way of emphasis. "It is inspiration, revelation. 'One glimpse of heaven within the tavern caught.' Look at Barrymore over there!" He pointed at a fat little man in the further corner. "I know for a fact that he is thinking out a new picture. Is he quite sober? No, like me, he is quietly, but quite convincingly, drunk."

"Well, what about just one more round?" asked Shannon.

As each of the others had already paid, it was obviously Praed's turn; but he rose with unsteady dignity.

"I thank you, but no more for me," he said. "I wish you good evening. If anything I have said has been of benefit to you, you are very welcome." He sat down heavily at another table and his 'thank you, a brandy,' boomed across the room to them.

"That's the only way to get rid of him," said Shannon. "He always leaves when it's his turn to pay for drinks."

"Don't want to be rude, Julian," said Dick, "but these people here strike me as a pretty rotten lot. Seem to glory in physical unfitness. I'd back Duggie to lay out any three of them at once."

Shannon nodded. "Never mind, it's part of your education to meet them. Hullo! There's Alison—that tall chap over there with the very short girl. She's Rita, a well-known model. You'll like him; he's a capital fellow: used to write political leaders for *Current Opinion*, but he

never could finish one without using the word 'vortex'; in the end it became a sort of King Charles's head and he gave it all up. Come and sit down, Ally," he cried, as the other came within earshot.

"Good evening, Julian." He bowed to Dick and Trevannagh. "I suppose you know Rita. I'm informed on unimpeachable authority—not my own, of course—that she has the finest figure in London." He gave her a paternal pat. "Small, I admit. *Ars longa, Rita brevis est.*"

"Are you going along to the Pentagon?" asked Shannon.

"Yes, we'll come along with you, if we may and then you stalwarts can dance with Rita and leave me in peace."

"It looks a bit fast to be seen with four men," Rita declared, obviously delighted at the prospect.

"What about making a move?" suggested Shannon.

"Right."

The Pentagon Club is no great distance from the Brasserie Latine. In common with all night clubs, and City tea-rooms, it is ten feet below street-level, thereby giving the impression that it is a haunt of secret subterranean vice. Consisting of two cellars, the club derives its name from the fact that the larger of these has five walls. Here dancing takes place, so long as five people remain on the floor, but if, at any time, the number falls below five, the club promptly closes. In the smaller cellar, which, by the fitting of a dummy wall, has also been made five-sided, refreshments may be obtained, different members acting as barmen for the night. The club has no paid servants, save a charwoman; even the orchestra is composed of volunteers and though frequently reduced to a piano alone, it is no uncommon thing to hear a famous violinist playing dance music for the public benefit. To a visitor, the total absence of ventilation is perhaps the most striking characteristic of the premises. From the outset the place depressed Dick. The painted courtesans damned it with the brand of the

commonplace and though a few girls in baggy trousers and with short hair hinted at something more esoteric, the general atmosphere was banal and sordid. Every one tried so patently to be natural and unrestrained that the effect produced was one of artificiality.

At the bar, whither Shannon led him, there were more women who ordered drinks at Dick's expense and then pocketed his change—a practice which first amused and finally irritated him. Shannon watched him with interest.

"It's no use trying to be critical, Dickie. Have another drink."

"No, I've had more than enough already. Let's collect Duggie and go home."

"But it's not one o'clock yet," Shannon protested.

"Damn the time, let's go."

They found Trevannagh in embarrassed conversation with one of the girls in baggy trousers. The topic was free love, upon which the lady seemed to hold strong and advanced views, while Trevannagh, not wishing to be thought conventional and being unable to diagnose the other's social status, was agreeing to the most astonishing propositions. He hailed their arrival with obvious relief:

"You chaps going? Well, I'm rather tired myself, so I'll come along. Good night, most interestin' chat," he added to the girl.

"Well, I only hope I've convinced you," she replied. "Marriage!" She laughed contemptuously. "A mediæval relic." And she made her way to the bar to indulge in liquid protest against this barbaric survival.

"For sheer unhealthiness," said Trevannagh as soon as they got him outside, "commend me to the Pentagon Club."

"Just because a girl discusses free love with you," Shannon retorted. "What about all your little affairs—Betty Barrington for example?"

"That's merely a case of wild oats, but these people are tares, my dear fellow, absolute tares."

"You mustn't take them too seriously. That girl will probably end up by marrying a stockbroker—orange blossom and 'The Voice that breathed o'er Eden'—and all that."

"That's just what I hate about the whole thing," Dick burst out. "It's all so damnably insincere. It isn't only the people to-night. It's everybody. One colossal sham."

"The only solid thing about that place was the atmosphere," said Trevannagh. "Let's walk home. My head is thicker than my father's loins," he concluded with a vague air of quotation.

On their way home Dick continued his diatribe:

"I want you chaps to understand what I mean when I say that the whole thing is a colossal sham. We've had three experimental nights in London, and we haven't found one grain of sincerity. Look at that dinner that Duggie gave us at the Carlton! They don't even dare to call boiled chicken boiled chicken. They have to dish it up under some foreign name. The world's mad on euphemism and malphemism, if there is such a word. You can't call a spade a spade. You must either call it the gardener's dumb but willing friend or a bloody shovel. There's no mean of sane sincerity. It's the same everywhere. No one dare give his real opinion for fear of being thought commonplace, yet at bedrock every one is more or less commonplace. How else can you get your standard of comparison? The world has a mania for individuality and the result is false and artificial self-expression. Well, it's not expression of self at all. Every one is trying to convince his neighbours that he has a hump on his back."

"You're making phrases, Dick," said Shannon crushingly, "and not very coherent phrases either."

But Dick refused to be daunted.

"All right: take concrete instances. Look at that

young fool Duggie introduced us to the other night. Came up and said, 'Yes, my dear boy, your clothes are *sans reproche*. I don't mind who sees me talking to you.' And then he remarked that he chooses his friends not for what they are but for what they wear and felt he'd said something clever. The worst of it was that he thought he meant it. —And that crowd at the music hall last night. They cheered and yelled over those patriotic songs, and yet they'll vote against an increase in the naval estimates."

"That wasn't sham," said Trevannagh, "that's just vox populi trying over its repertoire—can't sing the same tune for more than a note or two."

"Having looked on the wine when it was whisky, our Duggie is getting quite epigrammatic," Shannon observed, thereby spurring Trevannagh on to further efforts.

"I've often heard my father say that if you really want to know a woman you should watch her play Bridge," he said. "And if you really want to know a man, you should see him in action."

"He's right; he's perfectly right," Shannon agreed. "It's a sure touchstone. Physical fear is about the only emotion that no one cares to fake. Still—give peace in our time, O Lord."

* * * *

It is difficult for a man to imagine anything more enjoyable than a summer term at Oxford. First and foremost there is the river. Those who have traced the Nile to its source and seen the Amazon in flood will be the first to acknowledge the charm of the narrow waters of the Cherwell, as they flow under Magdalen Bridge. There is a quality of intimacy about the "Cher," which no other stream, save perhaps the Cam, has ever achieved. Its muddy bed has been scored by the punt-poles of generations of undergraduates. The trees, arching overhead, have provided staples to which numberless punts have been tethered. Its charm lies in its laziness. Laughter is the

only ripple that disturbs its surface. Ah ! the eight-weeks love affairs, the merriment of moonlight picnics, all as shallow as the waters of the little river and half-forgotten, as they merge into the open stream beyond.

The three friends fell at once under its spell. After an hour's tennis in the afternoon, Dick and Shannon would go down to Magdalen Bridge and punt slowly up the river, until it was time to come down and pick up Trevannagh, when cricket was finished for the day. Often they would take supper out with them and always they brought books which they never opened. The Cherwell has ploughed more men in the schools than the sternest examiner.

Trevannagh's failure to do himself justice at cricket was their only grumble against Fate. Coming up with a big reputation he had begun with a fine performance in the Freshmen's Match, but as the term wore on, he refused to practise or take the matter seriously. "I'd rather spend my time on the river with you chaps," he said, "and then I like to run down to London fairly often to see Betty. Of course, I'm not going to chuck up cricket, but I'm not going to swot for my 'blue.' " In vain they remonstrated with him : he steadfastly declined to take more than a desultory interest in the game.

"Look here, Duggie," said Shannon one evening, as they were drifting homeward with the current. "I know quite well why you've practically given up cricket. It isn't for the pleasure of our society ; it's because you think it would interfere with Betty. You're absolutely obsessed with that girl."

"Never knew you were so damned keen on cricket," retorted Trevannagh, "and anyway I thought we agreed not to mention Betty. I don't interfere with you and your ruddy spiritualism. Besides, it's a lie. She's frightfully keen for me to get my 'blue.' "

"I dare say ; but she's at the bottom of the whole thing. It's no use your pretending that you're afraid of schools

either, because you never do a stroke of work when you're with us. She's bad for your temper too." Shannon paused. "I don't want to pry into your private affairs, if there is such a thing as private affairs between you and me, but what are you going to do in the long vacation?"

"I'm going to play a bit of cricket and—well, of course, I expect I shall see a good deal of Betty."

"Exactly," rejoined Shannon, "but that's just where you're wrong. You're coming abroad with Dick and me."

"Eh?" cried Dick. "Where?"

"Spain," replied Shannon firmly.

There was a pause while the other two digested this decision.

"I haven't made any definite arrangements," said Trevannagh, who knew well enough that Shannon was in earnest, and would easily talk Dick over. "Still I don't quite see how I can get out of the other thing. What d'you think about it, Dick?"

"I thought of going to France—with you two of course. Er—Babette's spending the summer at Etretat or one of those places."

"You and your women are a perfect nuisance," Shannon observed. "Of course you're coming to Spain and I'm not going to let you back in England until a week before Term begins."

"I must admit it sounds attractive," said Dick. "I suppose you can speak the lingo, Julian."

"No. As a kiddie I had a Spanish nurse and, as far as I remember, I used to be able to speak a little. But after my mother died, the gov'nor couldn't bear to hear the sound of Spanish, so he sacked the nurse, and I was more or less forbidden to speak it. The only phrase that I can remember now was what I used to say to my nurse, when I was having my bath; it means 'Turn off the hot-water tap, you're scalding my foot.'"

"A snappy little thing of its kind," observed Trevannagh, "but hardly suitable for general conversation."

"I expect I'll soon pick it up again. Well, are we agreed about going?"

"You know perfectly well that I can't let you two go without me," said Trevannagh. He regarded them affectionately. "Betty'll be furious, but I can't help it, I must come."

"We couldn't go without you," said Dick. "Though I don't know why we should allow Julian to arrange our lives for us. We're both static and he's dynamic. We ought to be more energetic. We're just like a pair of sheep."

"No. You're just like the two best pals a man ever had. Damn! the moonlight's making us sentimental."

Having once obtained their consent, Shannon did not allow the grass to grow under his feet, and by the time "Eights week" had arrived, he had booked their passage and their rooms.

Miss Barrington and Babette came up together on the third day of the races and it was in their presence that Shannon announced his arrangements. He had had an anxious day preventing too long a *tête-à-tête* between Trevannagh and Betty and he was not disposed to spare anyone's feelings. Both girls manifested a pained surprise.

"Why, Douglas, you as good as promised me that you'd——"

The intimacy of Trevannagh's previously suggested plans forbade the completion of Betty's sentence. She turned in wrath upon Shannon. "You're always interfering with him—can't leave him alone. I can't think why he stands it."

"We hadn't really decided anything definite, Betty," pleaded Trevannagh miserably. "And, besides, you practically turned down the whole thing. If I'd known

you were so keen on it I wouldn't have accepted Julian's scheme. But it's all fixed up now and I can't back out."

But Miss Barrington refused to be appeased.

"I'd counted on you and now you've let me down. I thought I could trust you, but it seems you're like all the others."

"What others?" asked Shannon quickly, thereby silencing her for the moment.

Babette took the matter more philosophically.

"If you do not come, you do not come, and there is an end. And I do not know when I shall see you again, Deek; I have engagements in France that will keep me"—she indulged in digital arithmetic—"ten, eleven, twelve months. But we meet again, one day, yes?"

"You never told me that," said Dick, surprised that the news caused him no particular emotion. Babette shrugged her shoulders.

"I didn't know that you'd care," she replied teasingly.

"I don't," retorted Dick in the same vein.

But by the end of the afternoon they had worked themselves up into a state of passionate despair. It wasn't to be good-bye, of course, but it certainly looked uncommonly like it.

"You'll write," said Dick for the twentieth time.

"Of course," Babette meant what she said, but as a fact her subsequent correspondence amounted to one picture postcard of Boulogne.

"Only an incident, like all women," said Shannon, as they strolled back from the station after having seen the girls off. "It couldn't have gone on indefinitely." As Dick remained silent, he turned on Trevannagh. "And you, Duggie? Still as infatuated as ever?"

"Dry up."

"Um. I've thought of a new name for Betty—far

more appropriate than Queen Elizabeth, who, by the way, was a virgin."

"Really, what is it?" asked Trevannagh icily.

"Sappho," replied Shannon, "Daudet's version."

CHAPTER VI

THERE is no finer setting for flirtation than a ship. However sound his marksmanship on land, Cupid is at heart a marine gunner. On board ship there is an intimacy from which it is impossible to escape, and when one has read a couple of pages of a book and exhausted the resources of deck-quoits, there remains nothing but flirtation or poker.

With Algeciras as their goal, Shannon had booked passages for them as far as Gibraltar by P. & O. and they had been fortunate enough to secure a cabin with three berths.

Having taken possession of this apartment and having unpacked what he needed, Dick was proceeding on deck, when as he rounded the last bend in the companion, a hat struck him full in the face. Disentangling himself from the embrace of a couple of long ribbons, he found himself gazing into a pair of merry blue eyes.

"I'm so sorry," said the owner of the eyes.

"Oh, not at all," mumbled Dick and proceeded to take stock of the apparition. In his subsequent eulogy to Shannon and Trevannagh, he endowed her with a mass of golden hair, a pair of adorable blue eyes (he was particularly emphatic about the eyes) a *retroussé* nose ("not a bit snub, you know") and a mouth made for laughter and kisses. In describing her complexion he became involved in horticultural metaphor—to the intense delight of Shannon. To a less partial critic, she would appear as a pretty girl

of between twenty and twenty-two years of age, though, as a fact, she was then not quite nineteen.

"It's terribly windy on deck," she continued; "practically impossible to keep a hat on." Instinctively her hands began to arrange and smooth her hair.

"I suppose it is. I haven't been up yet." Dick wondered whether he ought to end the conversation and allow her to pass. Finally, taking his courage in both hands, he plunged into further speech: "Where are you bound for?"

"Algeciras, we always go there every summer."

"How ripping. We're going there too," said Dick, and they both blushed.

"Of course, it's really the wrong time of the year to go. Spring is the right season. But we love it in the summer."

"I'm sure I'm going to love it too," Dick decided recklessly.

"Well, I must go below and find mother." And she tripped past him down the companion, leaving him to ponder the problem of why pretty girls always had mothers lurking in the background.

On deck he found Shannon and Trevannagh and at once launched into lyrical description. "I suppose I can follow it up," he concluded.

"Of course," replied Shannon. "On board ship one leaves convention in the customs-house."

By skilful tipping Dick managed to secure a place opposite to her at dinner and was formally introduced to her mother, a stout, formidable woman, who surveyed him suspiciously through her lorgnettes.

"My daughter tells me that she made your acquaintance through her hat blowing off," she observed in a way that made Dick feel responsible for the high wind on deck.

"Yes," he admitted guiltily.

"Um." Having completed her inspection, she dropped the lorgnettes with a rattle. "Let me introduce you to

my husband, Mr. Effingham." She indicated an insignificant little man on her left whom Dick would never have connected with her. "I didn't catch your name."

"Goodall."

"Yes, Mr. Goodall, Howard," she repeated, as though Dick had confirmed her worst suspicions.

"Pleased to meet you," said the little man; "no relation to James Goodall of Gracechurch Street, I suppose?"

"Yes. He's my father."

"I know him," said Mr. Effingham, darkly, and disengaged himself from further conversation.

"He's not coming out with you, then?" asked Mrs. Effingham, breaking a long pause.

"No, I'm with my two friends." He introduced Shannon and Trevannagh. "We're supposed to be a reading party," he added with a laugh.

"Oh, then, you're up at College," Mrs. Effingham became more genial, "you're staying at Algeciras, Lois tells me."

"Yes."

"Then I hope we shall see something of you," she said graciously.

After dinner they all sat together, until Shannon suggested a game of Bridge.

"Yes, it will help to pass the evening," Mrs. Effingham agreed. "So we five had better cut out."

"I'm afraid I'm only a beginner," said Dick a trifle too hastily. "You four play without me."

Mrs. Effingham's lorgnettes came into play again and Dick shivered.

"Then you two had better come and watch," she commanded. "You'll be able to pick up a few hints, I dare say."

"But it's so stuffy down below, mother," Lois urged. "Do let me stay up on deck for another five minutes."

"Well, then, just five minutes." She paused. "But no more," she added menacingly.

Left alone with the girl, Dick racked his brains for some-

thing to say. To Babette he had found it easy enough to talk, but Lois was quite another proposition. The silence was broken by the girl.

“Do you really play Bridge?” she asked slyly.

“Well, I do play, as a matter of fact; that is, when there’s nothing better to do.”

“And you think that I’m something better to do. Thanks.”

Dick cursed himself for his clumsiness and decided that the best thing to do was to carry the war into the enemy’s country.

“If it comes to that, how d’you know that it’s so stuffy down below?”

“If you think that you’re the reason why I stayed on deck”—she paused effectively—“you’re right.”

“Do you really mean that?” Dick tried to strike a more earnest note.

“No, of course not. I don’t know what mother would say, if she could hear us. I’m flirting with you disgracefully, aren’t I? It must be the sea air.” She examined her watch. “My five minutes are up, I daren’t stay another second or I shall never hear the end of it.”

Dick followed her down into the saloon, arriving in time to hear Mrs. Effingham declare “one club” with an air of such finality that Trevannagh, who had a perfectly sound “no trump” call, passed through sheer fright. As the game proceeded, it became obvious to Dick that Mrs. Effingham was rapidly losing her temper. Having chosen her husband for partner, on the ground that it was absurd for her to pay Howard if she lost (“Husband and wife are one in Bridge,” Shannon remarked), she filled the intervals between the hands with a volume of criticism, advice and abuse. To this her husband paid not the slightest attention and Shannon and Trevannagh were therefore left to endorse or combat her opinions.

“Why did you lead the Queen of Spades, Howard? It

isn't, of course, that I mind losing, but when it comes to a ridiculous mistake like that—— Any other card in the pack would have done. Why not a small heart ? Howard, you're not listening to a word I'm saying."

"No," said Mr. Effingham shortly, "I'm not."

Mrs. Effingham went into the matter again with more detail.

"Played quite correctly," replied her husband. "Wasn't it ?" He appealed to his opponents.

"I really don't know enough about the game to give an opinion," said Trevannagh weakly.

"Quite correctly," Shannon agreed.

Up went Mrs. Effingham's lorgnettes. She inspected Shannon with curiosity. "Oh," she said, "Really !"

Lois nudged Dick. "I shall be sent to bed if she loses this rubber," she whispered. The prophecy proved correct.

"How much ?" demanded Mrs. Effingham, apparently making no attempt to add up the score. "Six hundred ? I only make it five." She glanced casually at the tablet. "Five-forty-two. Still, if you all agree. . . . I'll play just one more rubber, if you insist. What's the time ? Quarter to ten ? Time you were in bed, Lois. Run along. Now, Howard, just try and show a little more sense this time."

Knowing the futility of argument, Lois obediently went off and Dick, under the eye of her mother, lacked the courage to follow. After watching a couple more hands, he departed to smoke a meditative pipe on deck, where he was joined later by Shannon and Trevannagh.

Night and the sea breed silence. For a long time the three friends leant side by side over the taffrail without speaking.

"Solitude and space," said Dick, who was disposed to be sentimental. "No wonder they say that all sailors are poets at heart."

"You don't understand solitude, Dickie," replied Shannon sombrely. "There's no poetry in it—only horror." He shuddered. "Besides, solitude doesn't mean being in open places, it means being confined in something small—a coffin, for example—with no chance of communication with any living soul. Where there's space there's hope."

"What the devil are you talking about, Julian?" demanded Trevannagh. "Why, man, you're shaking like a leaf."

"I'm frightened," muttered Shannon.

"Your nerves are all to pieces," said Dick. "You've been monkeying about with this infernal spiritualism again?"

Shannon did not deny the accusation. "Something rather horrible happened yesterday. Yes, spiritualism, if you must know the truth. I admit I'm a fool to go on with it, but I can't help it. I can't help it. I'm not going to tell you what it was. You'd only laugh at me and call it nonsense. I can only pray God that it is."

"Well, I'm thankful you're going to have three months away from all that business," said Dick, knocking his pipe out. "Let's go below."

In their cabin, Shannon seemed to recover his spirits. "If I hadn't had the horrors to-night, I'd have put you through it, Dick, for appropriating the only pretty girl on board. My vanity's badly wounded—not that I think much of your future mother-in-law."

To Dick, watching him narrowly, this light-heartedness appeared somewhat forced, nevertheless he thought it best to answer in the same strain.

"Lois doesn't want a morbid old cynic; she's after something young, fresh and innocent, like me."

Shannon did not reply, and there was a long pause.

"That's a jolly, pretty girl," declared Trevannagh, returning after a final drink. "I congratulate you on your discovery, Dick."

But now this theme failed to rouse Dick's eloquence. The tense, drawn look on Shannon's face worried him.

"What is the matter with you, Julian? You've been in great form all day and now you suddenly develop blue devils. You're only serious about once a year, but when you are, you're simply damned neurotic. You're more like a kid that's frightened of the dark than anything else."

"I'm sorry," said Shannon curtly. "Good night."

Far from making him drowsy, the throb of the propellers kept Dick awake. In the berth above him, he could hear Shannon tossing fitfully in his sleep, and occasionally muttering some incoherency to himself. Then quite suddenly his voice rose. "There you are, Duggie," he cried. "Thank God! But where's Dick?" The voice turned to an emasculated whimper, "I've only just left him and now I can't find him. O Christ, why didn't I wait for him? We've lost him, Duggie, we've lost him!"

Though the words themselves were commonplace enough to be caused by ordinary nightmare, the tones in which they were uttered were so charged with terror that Dick felt his flesh creep. Jumping from the bunk, he caught Shannon by the shoulder and wakened him.

"Stop that damned row," he ordered sharply.

Shannon blinked at him stupidly for a moment and Dick noticed that his forehead was thick with sweat.

"What have I been doing?" he demanded.

"Talking in your sleep."

"What did I say?" he asked quickly.

"I couldn't catch what you said," Dick lied, "but you made a dreadful noise, and nearly woke Duggie."

Shannon did not smile, but the answer seemed to relieve him.

"You're right about this occultism, Dick. I'll take a holiday away from it. I thought my nerves would stand anything, but it must have shaken me up a bit, without my knowing it. And the odd part of it is that one goes

all to pieces suddenly, without any warning. At least, that's how it seems to have taken me."

"Why not give it up altogether?"

Shannon shook his head, and from the gesture Dick was aware that the old, obstinate Julian had returned and driven out the frightened child of a minute ago.

"Tell me one thing," asked Dick, knowing that it was useless to argue with him. "Are you what they call 'clairvoyant'?"

"Yes—to a certain degree. Why?"

"I only wondered," said Dick.

The following morning, as he had expected, Shannon made no allusion to this incident. He seemed completely himself again and enlivened the process of dressing with his usual cynical chatter.

Dick and Trevannagh were ready first and went on deck to have a blow before breakfast. A short, choppy sea was running, but the sun was shining brightly—a perfect day for all but the worst of sailors.

"Julian was in a rum state last night," said Trevannagh. "I can't think why a chap like that should get mixed up with all this unpleasant spiritualistic business. By the way, while you were having your bath, he told me what had upset him yesterday. Of course, it's all rot, but rot is unhealthy!"

"It's not all rot. We've seen enough to know that. But I'm convinced that four-fifths is fraud on one side or the other. What was the trouble yesterday?"

"I can't tell you—he made me promise not to."

Dick felt uncomfortable. "Nothing about me?" he asked.

"No. Let's drop the subject."

At this moment Lois appeared on deck and began making her way gingerly towards them.

"Good morning," she cried. "Will one of you get out and hold the ship still, while I walk as far as the rail?"

"Certainly, Miss Effingham," replied Dick, "I will send our Mr. Trevannagh below at once to see what he can do."

Trevannagh took the hint and, muttering something about breakfast, disappeared.

"Mother's sea-sick," she announced, not without a certain satisfaction.

"*Mal-de-mère*," said Dick and wondered vaguely how many people must have made the joke before.

"And as father always spends his mornings in the smoking-room," she continued, "I'm a lone, lorn, defenceless female until lunch."

"I'll defend you," Dick declared gallantly.

"Thank you. D'you know, I don't believe your friend Mr. Trevannagh likes me. Why did he run away just now?"

"He was merely trying to display tact," said Dick, and they both blushed.

"Well, I'm going to try and display my appetite. Breakfast," she decided.

Having finished this meal, the three friends went on deck again, where they were soon joined by Lois.

"You told me you were a reading party," she said, "so I've come to watch you do some reading."

"Unfortunately at the last moment I forgot to pack any books," Shannon replied. "Still, I can always borrow yours, Dick."

"It's an extraordinary thing, but I can't find mine anywhere."

Trevannagh fumbled underneath his chair and with a certain pride produced a bulky volume. "Stubbs' Charters," he announced mournfully. "Still, if you chaps aren't going to do any work . . ."

"D'you know what I found Julian doing the last day of term?" said Dick. "He'd got a terrific pile of law books and he was just glancing through them and writing on the first page of each—'one week'—'ten days'—and so

on. I think the total added up to six months and four days, so I suppose you're not going to open them until six months and four days before schools ; eh, Julian ? ”

“ Of course not.”

“ Well, I think you're all very lazy,” declared Lois. “ Except, of course, Mr. Trevannagh.”

“ If you're really going to read, Duggie, Miss Effingham and I mustn't disturb you with our airy persiflage,” said Dick. “ I think if we moved our chairs a little further along, we could still watch you without breaking your studious calm.”

From Dick's point of view the voyage was idyllic. Though the weather was fine, the sea remained sufficiently rough to prevent Mrs. Effingham's appearance on deck. Apart from a constitutional walk of five minutes after each meal, her husband spent the whole day in the smoking-room, and Lois was left to her own devices—and Dick's. Shannon and Trevannagh generously assisted him by drawing off Mr. Effingham, whenever that gentleman showed a desire for his daughter's society.

“ He's the most soulless man I've ever met,” Shannon declared one day. “ And therefore rather interesting. He can talk about nothing except the state of the market and has reduced everything to a money basis. He actually told me that he didn't think much of *Paradise Lost* as a poem, because Milton only received five pounds for it.”

“ Never mind,” replied Dick, “ you keep him in play, while I go ahead with Lois.”

“ Making satisfactory progress ? ” asked Trevannagh.

“ Don't be inquisitive, Duggie, you don't seem to realize that this is a serious matter.”

“ Good Lord, you aren't going to propose to the girl ? ”

Dick laughed uneasily.

“ For heaven's sake, do nothing rash,” Shannon advised earnestly. “ Before you marry a girl, always have a good

look at her mother. The odds are that she will grow up like her."

"Lois won't grow up like her mother," said Dick with a shudder. "Nobody could. Mrs. Effingham is unique."

"I admit she's an attractive girl—hardly more than a child, of course—but still, attractive," said Shannon in his most irritating manner. "But don't go and rush into an engagement or anything foolish like that. Marriage isn't a sacrament you know, it's an experiment—and a damned risky one at that."

"Don't behave like a pair of fools," Dick advised. "She wouldn't accept me, anyway, and if she did, her people wouldn't sanction it." But, in spite of this assertion, the girl certainly showed as much desire for his company as he did for hers.

On the night before their arrival at Gibraltar, the pair, as of custom, went for a final stroll on deck. The breeze had freshened and the ship was pitching and rolling with a persistency that had driven most of the other passengers below. A sudden lurch of the vessel flung Lois into Dick's arms and, forgetful of all save the passion of the contact, he kissed her. She tried to disengage herself, but another roll threw her even more intimately into his embrace. Dick took this second lurch as a direct sign of heaven's approval and repeated the kiss.

"How dare you!" she began, and then broke into a low laugh. Dick, who had the hatred, common to all sensitive people, of being made to look sentimentally ridiculous, laughed too.

"Entirely the ship's fault," he said reprovingly, trying to pretend that he had himself well in hand, though his pulses were racing wildly.

"Then you didn't really want to kiss me?" she asked mischievously.

This placed Dick in a dilemma. If he admitted that it was the desire of his heart to kiss her, he laid himself open

to be laughed at as a love-sick idiot. Lois, he knew well enough, would not spare him. If, on the other hand, he turned it off with a joke, he might lose a delightful opportunity. In the second that he was trying to evolve a compromise between these two extremes, the ship, taking the matter into her own more capable hands, gave another heavy roll and Lois was forced to clutch hold of him for support. This time the feel of her body in his arms proved too much for him and he flung his restraint overboard. Crushing her to him, he kissed her again and again, until the girl, her passion aroused, returned kiss for kiss. Finally she lay back limp and exhausted in his arms, while Dick, his back against the wall of a cabin, tried to maintain their balance. As the ship buried her nose in a heavy sea, he stumbled forward, barking his shin, and the momentary pain recalled him to sanity.

"I say, Lois," he began evenly, and paused to consider the situation. The girl still lay inert in his arms and, to his astonishment, Dick perceived that she was crying softly; this was a phase undreamt of in his philosophy.

"What is the matter?" he asked.

"How could you, Dickie!" she sobbed.

Suddenly he felt intensely masculine and masterful.

"Stop crying, Lois, darling," he ordered.

She became calmer. "We must both have been mad," she decided.

"Why? About the sanest thing we ever did, I should think."

"I'm so tired," she said plaintively, "I'm going to bed."

"Not till I've had another kiss," he declared with the air of a man who expects protest but is determined to have his own way. However, to his surprise, she yielded, kissing him tenderly, without passion.

"Good night, Dickie," she whispered and disappeared down the companion.

Dick stayed on deck for awhile to reason the incident

into its proper perspective. What a ridiculous fuss about a kiss or two, was his first thought. Still, she was so young that perhaps she'd never been kissed before. He found this a very satisfying explanation. How different she was from Babette. The latter was a wild flower, there for any hand to pluck, but Lois was a hot-house blossom, a prize to which few could aspire. This absurd metaphor pleased him vastly and he chuckled. Still the fact remained substantially true; he, Dick, had really touched this girl's heart. He reflected with pride that her passion had even driven her to tears. . . . It went without saying that the matter was not going to end there; this evening was only a foretaste of what was to come. Duggie and Julian would probably guess, but of course, he couldn't tell them; it was just a secret between him and Lois. Ought he to propose to her straight away or should he wait? If one married every girl one kissed, polygamy would be rampant. One could honourably remain silent for a bit, for there was plenty of time, the whole summer in fact. Besides, it wasn't a thing to be done on the spur of the moment. Having reached this point, Dick perceived for the first time that it was infernally cold on deck and went below to irritate Shannon and Trevannagh by a mysterious and exalted silence.

"Where the deuce have you been all the evening?" Trevannagh demanded at length.

"Oh, knocking about," replied Dick airily.

"Well, I hope you had a better time of it than we did," said Shannon. "Two hours of Father Effingham. Good Lord! That chap quotes Ottoman Railways and Consols with as much ease as I quote Swinburne and Wilde."

"I think we ought to find out exactly what our little Dick's been up to. Just notice the unholy twinkle in his eyes?" Dick felt himself blushing.

"My worst suspicions are confirmed," Trevannagh declared. He whispered provokingly in Shannon's ear.

"Right? Of course I'm right. Look at the powder on the lad's shoulder. Tut-tut!" He picked something from Dick's coat and held it up to the light. "You really ought to get your hair cut, my son; fancy allowing it to grow to this length!"

This banter brought Dick back to earth. After all, it hadn't been anything so very wonderful. Just a commonplace flirtation.

"If you go on long enough, you may say something funny," he retorted. "But I'm too sleepy to wait for it. Good night."

They awoke next morning to find that the throbbing of the screw had ceased and that the ship was riding upon an even keel. Each of them tried lazily to fathom this phenomenon, until Shannon, having reached the obvious explanation, sprang out of bed.

"By gad, we've arrived," he announced and peered anxiously through the scuttle. "Can't get any sort of a view through here. Let's dress and go on deck."

"What! At six in the morning? Not for any view in the world."

"Well, you'll come, Dick? If it's as early as that, we need not bother about dressing. Besides, Gibraltar is probably just as keen to survey my kimono as I am to see Gibraltar." He slipped his arms into a gorgeous black and gold creation and after a short sermon to Trevannagh on laziness, left the cabin. Dick followed more leisurely. He thought it just possible that some of the ladies might also be tempted on deck and had a terror of an encounter unshaven.

The view which greeted him was indeed worth the trouble of rising. Dominating the whole scene, Gibraltar towered, stark and menacing, above the vessel. While admitting its grandeur, he found it monstrous, even grotesque, bearing no relevancy to the rest of the landscape. From the harbour, the town rose tier on tier, then, as

though unable to climb higher, it stopped and the rock remained gaunt and naked. Here and there, along the skyline, he could see the grim silhouette of a gun. . . . Turning, he looked across the bay to Algeciras, a cluster of white buildings, sparkling in the sun. Behind the town, the ground sloping upward is thickly wooded, but at the northern end of the bay the hills are bare, and the highest of these, the Queen of Spain's Seat, seems to fling an eternal yet hopeless challenge to the "Rock." Across the straits, where Atlantic and Mediterranean meet, dawns the grey mystery of Africa.

Dick was one of those people whose emotions are more easily excited through the eyes than through the ears. Music scarcely moved him, but a fine painting or a noble view caused him a real thrill of pleasure. For a long time he stood, turning his head this way and that to catch some new aspect of the bay and unmindful of Shannon, who, careless of any particular audience, was reciting Browning's "Home Thoughts from the Sea."

"Well?" said Dick at length.

"Wonderful," replied Shannon laconically.

"There's a monument to England's might," said Dick, pointing towards the Rock.

"Let's hope that it may not be her tombstone."

"You can't be morbid on a morning like this, Julian, especially in that dressing-gown."

"Whenever I'm serious for a moment, you call me morbid. I can't always be a jester. *Neque semper arcum tendit Apollo*. Besides, what's the matter with this kimono?"

"I don't know what you two are quarrelling about," said a voice, "but I think Mr. Shannon's dressing-gown is perfectly lovely."

They turned to discover Lois, fully dressed and, to Dick at any rate, more exquisite than any view.

"Oh, I say," he began awkwardly and wound himself

more tightly in his bath-gown. Shannon remained unabashed.

"If you get up so early in the morning, you must expect to see strange sights," he said.

"I couldn't sleep last night for thinking of Mr. Goodall. He's been making violent love to me, you know."

Dick took his cue promptly. "You wait till I get really violent."

"Enough to give any one insomnia," Shannon sympathized. "Our Dick's a bit of a dasher."

Lois laughed and turned to look at the view. "It is gorgeous, isn't it?" she said.

Shannon appropriated the compliment to his dressing-gown.

"I'm so glad you like it. That consoles me for Dick's jealous outburst."

"I don't know how you have the nerve to stand and talk to a lady in that thing," said Dick. "Why, you haven't even shaved."

"True. It shall be done forthwith. I'll leave you to make my apologies, Dick," and he disappeared.

For once Dick was not grateful of being left alone with Lois. Though she seemed disposed to treat the incident of the previous evening lightly and even to tease him about it in front of Shannon, he was uncertain whether he ought to strike the same note now that they were alone. Perhaps, after all, it was the safest course to adopt.

"Quite forgiven me for last night?" he asked jauntily.

"You look so nice in those things that I could forgive you—er—for greater sins!"

"For example?"

"Oh, I don't know. I'll discuss the matter with you when you're dressed. Mother brought me up to judge men by their clothes, but you can't really form an opinion on pyjamas and a dressing-gown."

"You don't really know what a man looks like until you've seen him in pyjamas."

"I think the conversation's getting—well—indelicate. I won't speak another word to you until you're clothed and in your right mind."

Mrs. Effingham appeared at breakfast and seemed determined to signal her return to social life by being more than usually unpleasant to every one. However, to Dick she continued to be gracious, and on discovering that the three friends were the only other passengers for Algeciras, suggested that they should amalgamate parties—a proposal hailed with delight by Dick.

Those two months in Spain were to rank in Dick's memory as the happiest that he had ever spent, and afterwards, when he had gone down into the valley of sorrow, he was to look back on this as the highest peak of happiness that he had climbed. Yet from this height he could make no guess of what lay beyond.

And indeed those days passed by merrily enough. There were expeditions to the cork-woods behind the town, culminating in a memorable picnic at which Dick and Lois were lost for over an hour. This escapade provided Mrs. Effingham with a text for a sermon on propriety, in which recurred constantly the rhetorical question, "What would our friends at Wimbledon have said, if they could have seen you?"—an improbable but fruitful hypothesis. There was unlimited bathing in the warm waters of the bay, where Dick gave Lois swimming lessons and found her so apt a pupil that Shannon cynically denounced her inability as an imposture. Then there were tennis tournaments in which Trevannagh and Shannon always struggled for the first prize, while Dick, partnered by Lois, was sure to reach the semi-finals.

One week-end they spent at Tangier, where Trevannagh was so far unfaithful to Betty as to indulge in an affair, brief but very ardent, with a Spanish dancing-girl.

Even Shannon, who, since leaving Georgette had maintained or at least affected a strict asceticism, started, under the guise of learning Spanish, an amazingly rapid flirtation with a young widow staying in the hotel. The lessons were conducted on the Berlitz system, *à deux*, but the hours were irregular—so irregular, indeed, that Mrs. Effingham felt herself called upon to express her opinion in no uncertain fashion. She even went so far as to give the Spanish widow a piece of her mind, but as neither lady understood a word of the other's language, it is doubtful whether she conveyed anything more than an impression of hostility. In the guerilla warfare of looks and lorgnettes, Mrs. Effingham had no superior.

In spite of unlimited opportunity, Dick's love-making remained indefinite. As Shannon phrased it, "he went about with a proposal hanging from his lips like saliva, which always seemed about to drop but never did." There were some crucial moments, but his horror of making himself ridiculous drove him to take refuge in humorous innuendo.

Soon after his arrival at Algeciras, he had written to his father, demanding information about Mr. Effingham. In reply Mr. Goodall had dismissed him as "a good man to keep in with; one of the first Spanish merchants in the city." Dissatisfied with this, Dick wrote to his uncle for more detail and to this he received a characteristic answer: "I don't know much about Howard Effingham. I meet him occasionally at the club. A good man at business, but a terrible bore at lunch. A fine Bridge player. You don't mention a daughter, but I suppose he has one. They tell me that he has a horrible wife, but marriage has spoilt better men. He combines business with pleasure by going to Spain every summer and personally visiting the houses with which he deals, so I don't suppose you will see much of him at Algeciras. If he offers you a cigar, take one, as he has a very pretty taste in them. Out of avuncular

affection, I will, if you insist, cultivate him on his return to England."

With the exaction of this promise, which was the whole purport of his letter, Dick had to be content. Though the Effinghams were not returning to England till the end of November, Dick had already oriented his Christmas vacation to Lois and had even gone so far as to invite her up to "Eights Week" and "Commem." the following summer. To Mrs. Effingham he suggested that she should call on his mother as soon as she got back to town—a proposal to which she graciously assented. Anything in the nature of an *entente* with Mr. Effingham was out of the question, but as he seemed to take little or no interest in Lois, Dick felt that he could afford to neglect him.

Although quite infatuated with her, his habit of indecision was too powerful, and his last day at Algeciras dawned with the proposal still unspoken.

Keyed up to a state of sentimental exhilaration by a farewell cocktail, he took her for a final walk in the gardens to say good-bye, in spite of Shannon's protests that he would make them miss the boat. At this eleventh hour he felt that courage would be vouchsafed him.

At a summer-house in the least-frequented corner of the hotel grounds, they halted.

"You'll write and tell me everything," he insisted.

"Of course."

"I wish I wasn't so infernally young," said Dick, à propos of nothing and felt vaguely ashamed of the confession.

"You'll meet heaps of other fellows when you get back to England," he continued gloomily, "and you'll forget all about me."

"I shan't."

"Well, if you find anyone you like better than me, promise to write and let me know." Dick thought this

rather subtle. He was assuming an arrangement that had never been made.

Lois laughed. "Why should I?" she asked and made the issue direct.

He found his collar acutely uncomfortable. He framed a grandiloquent declaration, abandoned it, and then his passion for the indefinite reasserted itself.

"Because I should like to know," he said weakly, and cursed himself for a coward. Still, suppose she laughed at him.

"Why?" asked Lois. ("Socrates in a skirt," thought Dick and felt better.)

"You know why," he replied with intense meaning and thereby transferred the burden of dissimulation to her.

"I don't."

"Yes, you do." Even this tortuous bypath might lead eventually to his goal.

"Supposing I do know?"

"Well?" Why on earth couldn't one of them speak out?

He told himself that he was there to ask a question, a simple, direct question demanding few words. It was even manifest that Lois expected him to ask it. Yet here he was skirting round the subject without ever getting to it. The thought flashed across his mind that he must have inherited this habit of circumlocution from his mother. He made one last desperate effort to rally his fleeing courage.

"Well what?" asked Lois after a pause.

"We both seem to be asking ridiculous questions that haven't got an answer."

"You started it. Do you really want to ask me anything or are you merely making conversation?" ("Leading me on and then going to laugh at me," thought Dick.)

"Yes, I do want to ask you something."

"Well?"

"I want to know," Dick began slowly and painfully,

and then, like Bob Acres, his courage oozed away with a vengeance. There was that boat to catch. He mustn't miss that. And the other two would be waiting for him. "What's the time, I wonder," he said abruptly.

"If you only wanted to know the time, you should have stayed in the hotel near the clock, instead of bringing me out here, when I haven't got my watch on." Lois felt that she could have shaken him. Having gone as far as modesty permits, in trying to help him out, she had a right to be annoyed. She was too angry to see the essential absurdity of the situation.

At this moment they heard Trevannagh's voice calling "Dick" with great urgency.

"I've got to go. Just one more kiss, Lois," pleaded Dick.

"No."

Though inarticulate, Dick was no sluggard when it came to action, and a brisk little struggle was in progress, when Trevannagh appeared on the scene to be greeted with a marked lack of enthusiasm.

"Sorry to disturb you," he said and wished he had thought of some other remark. "We've only got about ten minutes, you know."

"All right, I'm coming," said Dick, with something akin to relief in his voice. He remembered his farewells with Babette and reflected that he was a poor hand at saying good-bye.

With the expression of aristocrats walking to the tumbril, they made their way to the landing-stage, where Shannon and Mrs. Effingham were awaiting them. An interlude of hand-shaking followed.

"I shall call on your mother when I get back to England," announced Mrs. Effingham threateningly.

"Yes, do. Good-bye, Mrs. Effingham. Good-bye, Lois. I'll write as soon as we land."

The little steamer, which was to take them to the P. & O.,

now lying in the bay, began to move to the accompaniment of much shouting and hooting from the syren.

"The ultimate osculations having been concluded, Cæsar set sail for Britain," said Trevannagh. "Example of the use of the Ablative Absolute."

To Dick, fast in the slough of despond, this levity was insupportable.

"I shan't see her again till Christmas," he muttered, as one who surveys a long term of penal servitude.

"Did you speak the fateful words, Dick?" asked Shannon. "Are we to commiserate with you?"

"I always sink to a crisis, it's the family motto," he replied gloomily. Even lunch on board the P. & O. failed to cheer him and he regarded the other passengers with hostility.

"Did you ever see such a lot of stumers?" he demanded.

"Let's go on deck," suggested Shannon sympathetically.

"By Jove, we're off already."

The great ship began to move slowly through the water; Gibraltar and Algeciras seemed to drift quietly astern, while Dick, leaning over the rail, steadily waved his handkerchief to Lois, who, in the seclusion of a certain summer-house in the least-frequented corner of the hotel grounds, was enjoying a placid flirtation with an American financier of fifty.

CHAPTER VII

THE Michaelmas term slipped by without untoward incident. Dick and his two friends occasionally turned out to play soccer for the college and, failing that, there was always golf to satisfy their somewhat spasmodic enthusiasm for exercise. Then there were orgies of book-buying on Shannon's part, which had to be supervised by Dick. Often they would spend whole afternoons turning over old volumes in one of the second-hand bookshops. . . . But it was the evenings that Dick most enjoyed. As soon as dinner was finished they would sit down to Bridge, their fourth, in the absence of Von Ecke, who with German thoroughness had started reading seriously for his finals, being a freshman named Grayley, who had been at Harrow with them. He had rooms on the kitchen staircase, which were reputed to be the quietest in college, and for this reason generally acted as host, professing himself much honoured by being allowed so frequently to entertain the three second-year men. They would play on steadily until midnight and then stroll back across the starlit quad to Shannon's room, there to discuss Shakespeare and the musical glasses, with frequent reference to Shannon's whisky, until the early hours of the morning.

Having passed the Law Preliminary Examination at the end of the preceding term, they could look forward to at least a year's untroubled ease. "Schools" were as yet a cloud no bigger than a man's hand upon their distant horizon and as such could be dismissed, along with death

and other remote tribulations. When one is twenty-one, two years seem an encroachment upon eternity.

Shannon had already announced that he would devote six months and no more in preparing for his finals. Dick, less confident, placed the period of legal incubation needful to secure a "second" at nine months, while Trevannagh talked rather bombastically about working for the whole of his last year. But on one point they were all determined, that for at least a year nothing in the shape of work should be attempted. They even instituted a system of fines for anyone discovered looking into a text-book, Trevannagh being mulcted in a dinner for the offence of taking Stubbs to Spain.

At his mother's instance, Dick passed the whole of the Christmas vacation at home. Trevannagh had invited both him and Shannon to stay at Poldene, but Dick excused himself on the ground that, having spent the whole of the summer abroad, he must devote at least a month to his family. Besides, there were numerous engagements with Lois which he had no wish to cancel.

A few days after his arrival, Mrs. Goodall received a brief note from Mrs. Effingham, announcing that that lady and her daughter would do themselves the honour of calling upon her, if convenient, the following Sunday. Dick had, of course, warned her that such a visit was probable, but the letter was couched in such peremptory tones that Mrs. Goodall was somewhat flustered.

"Tell me about this friend of yours, this Mrs. Effingham," she said. "What is she like?"

Dick, who was carving himself some ham at the side-board, grinned secretly.

"A charming woman: I'm sure you'll get on A1 together."

"But she writes in such a peculiar way," Mrs. Goodall insisted.

"Ah, that's only her manner."

“ ‘Your son has doubtless told you a great deal about us,’ ” quoted Mrs. Goodall. “ But you haven’t, darling. I’ve just heard that you met a girl, called Lois, at Algeciras, and asked her mother to call on me—rather a strange thing to do. You’re very casual, dearest boy.”

“ Sorry, mother : but I particularly want you to meet her.”

“ Perhaps she’s interested in church work,” she suggested hopefully.

“ Not that I know of.”

Mrs. Goodall sighed. “ Then I shall ask your uncle to meet them. He’s always so good at talking to strangers. And, of course, you’ll be there, darling ? ”

“ Rather,” said Dick, fervently.

When it came, Mrs. Effingham’s visit was less a call than a reconnaissance in force. Hearing the sound of a motor, Dick was at the window in time to see her arrive. It was at once evident that she did not intend anything to escape her. Examining and dismissing the street with a glance, she concentrated her attention upon the house—even walking out into the road in order to obtain a more comprehensive view. Apparently reassured by the lace-curtains and the polish on the door-knocker, she rang the bell and beckoned to Lois, who had remained in the car, to emerge. As they were announced, Dick rushed forward and performed a breathless introduction.

“ Mrs. Effingham—my mother. Lois—my mother. How are you ? ”

“ Lois has a very bad cold,” announced her mother. “ I should advise you not to go too close to her ”—as though Dick were about to embrace her. “ It was against my better judgment that I brought her this afternoon,” she added with the air of a magistrate extending leniency to a first offender.

Mrs. Effingham then proceeded to take stock of Dick’s mother and finally, with much condescension, shook hands.

"I'm so pleased to meet you, Mrs. Effingham," said Mrs. Goodall. "Dick has told me such a lot about you that I feel I know you quite well already."

"Indeed," replied Mrs. Effingham, suspiciously, and seemed to be making a mental inventory of the contents of the room.

"I must really thank you for all your kindness to him in Spain," continued the other, uncomfortably aware that her charm of manner was not meeting with its wonted response.

"Not at all."

"So good of you to come up all the way from . . ."—she tried vainly to recall the address—"Surbiton" she hazarded.

"Wimbledon," said Mrs. Effingham frigidly.

"Ah, yes! How silly of me. Wimbledon, of course."

"Mother's been trying to match some silk at Liberty's," whispered Lois to Dick, "and it always upsets her."

Dick told himself that he was enjoying the situation immensely, that the scene was delicious comedy, but it was essential to his plans that this meeting between his mother and Mrs. Effingham should be a success.

"I'm afraid you must have had rather a dull time at Algeciras after we left," he said, and wondered why Lois, who had supplied this information, was blushing.

"I don't know that your absence made all that difference," retorted Mrs. Effingham dryly, and then, afraid that she had gone too far, smiled.

"Quite right, Mrs. Effingham," said Mrs. Goodall, laughing, though secretly she strongly resented this slur upon her son. "You thoroughly deserved it, Dick."

With this tribute to her wit and with the advent of tea, Mrs. Effingham thawed somewhat. While still maintaining her dignity, she condescended more graciously, and the two ladies achieved sympathy in common denunciation. What the one held to be "unchristian," the other con-

demned as "improper and unladylike," and Dick and Lois, who were arranging a series of dances, came in for a double anathema.

"I'm not at all sure that I approve of the modern dances," declared Mrs. Goodall. "Only last Sunday our vicar—a most eloquent man—was preaching against the laxity of the present-day ball-room. He said that no one who read his Bible with intelligence could doubt that they were inspired by the Evil One."

"They're improper," said Mrs. Effingham, as though using a stronger epithet.

"Salome," said Mrs. Goodall, clinching the argument.

The other lady, who thought that a reference to Miss Maud Allan was intended, replied with a vigorous attack upon classical dancing, and Dick and Lois were only saved from a personal application of this diatribe by the arrival of Uncle Dick.

"You're late, Richard," said Mrs. Goodall after introducing him to the visitors.

"Oh, but one is appreciated so much more when one is late."

"We were discussing dancing," remarked Mrs. Effingham, who still had one or two good things to say upon this topic and was determined not to let the chance escape her.

"Capital exercise," said Uncle Dick, uncertain as to what attitude he should adopt, but determined to be in opposition to his sister-in-law.

"Yes. But modern dancing, Richard. It's—it's not RIGHT," said Mrs. Goodall softly, with an apprehensive glance at Dick and Lois.

"What nonsense, my dear Lorna," replied Uncle Dick brusquely.

"I entirely agree with Mrs. Goodall," announced Mrs. Effingham. "In fact I'm not at all sure whether I ought to allow Lois to go to dances. It's her first season, you know."

" Oh, I say, Mrs. Effingham," Dick remonstrated.

" I'm not at all sure that I ought to let her go," repeated Mrs. Effingham. Uncle Dick made derogatory noises into his cup.

" Of course you'll let me go, mother," said Lois demurely. " However else do you expect to get me married ? "

" Lois, how can you be so vulgar ! " cried her mother angrily. " Ever since she's been back from school, she's been absolutely out of hand," she added apologetically to Mrs. Goodall. " I certainly shall not let you go."

" Oh, I don't know, Mrs. Effingham ; I suppose they must enjoy themselves while they're young." Mrs. Goodall sighed and racked her brain for an appropriate misquotation to round off the topic. " To the young all things are pure," she said with vague sentiment.

By natural sequence, the theatre was the next subject of discussion, and Uncle Dick held the fort of the new drama against a combined assault by the two ladies, who became more in accord as the conversation became more heated. In the further corner of the room, Lois and Dick made whispered plans, stretching far away into the next summer. The visit ended with many expressions of goodwill between Mrs. Goodall and Mrs. Effingham.

" Well, mother ? " asked Dick, when they had taken their leave.

" I think she's very nice, darling, and I'm sure her mother is a good woman."

" Her mother's very ill-bred," said Uncle Dick shortly.

" Kind hearts are more than crowns," replied Mrs. Goodall witheringly, and made an effective exit.

" You did splendidly, Uncle Dick," said Dick. " By opposing 'em both, you've driven them into each other arms."

" Just what I meant to do," chuckled Uncle Dick, to whom this tactical aspect had not previously occurred.

" Hang Ma Effingham ! What d'you think of Lois ? "

"A very pretty girl: very pretty indeed."

"Yes, isn't she?" cried Dick, gratefully, and listened with patience to an exposition of the principles of Gothic architecture, which Uncle Dick had several times tried to work off on Mrs. Effingham.

In spite of her mother's threats, Lois managed to go to several dances and theatres under Dick's escort, but, if she failed to come herself, Mrs. Effingham always contrived to find some half-declared chaperon to report Lois' behaviour to her. Her information was almost supernatural in its accuracy.

"I do wish you would not sit out two dances running, in a conservatory of all places," she said to Dick. "One may be quite unobjectionable; but two—no. A conservatory is the tomb of a girl's reputation."

Dick would stammer that she must have been misinformed. "Oh, I know," she would say, and reduce him to silence.

On one occasion he was invited to dine with the Effinghams at their home in Wimbledon—a large modern house, with stained-glass windows and armour in the hall, an incongruity, which shocked Dick as he wiped his boots on the "Vale" of the door-mat. The only other guest was a young barrister, who was the local pretender to Lois' hand, and in his determination to outstay this rival, Dick missed the last train back to town and had to ask Mrs. Effingham to put him up for the night—a request which strained her sense of hospitality almost to breaking-point.

Over a final whisky-and-soda with his host, Dick, goaded by the discovery of a rival, was moved to discover his passion for Lois.

"You know, sir, I'm really awfully fond of Lois" he said in what he considered to be an off-hand manner.

"Um," said Mr. Effingham.

Dick was disappointed.

"Most frightfully fond," he amended, hoping to provoke a more definite reply by the use of the superlative. He succeeded.

"Couple of young fools," commented Mr. Effingham, briefly.

Dick took a gulp of whisky and returned to the attack: much easier and more dignified, this, than flopping down on his knees in front of Lois.

"Of course, sir, I know we're both very young"—— he began, but his host cut him short.

"Suppose I'll have to lend you some pyjamas." And Dick, taking the hint, dropped the subject.

Easter term and Easter vacation passed in an unbroken routine of pleasure, and Dick was utterly idle, completely at ease. Shannon seemed to have abandoned his psychic quests and thereby to have eliminated his occasional fits of depression. Trevannagh, though getting more and more entangled with Betty Barrington, remained his delightful, untroubled self, and his infatuation was a subject of mirth rather than anxiety to his two friends. As for Lois, Dick found the idea of rivalry rather stimulating. The course of true love, proverbially, does not run smooth. It is the creaking of Cupid's chariot that makes the music of the spheres.

Yet, happy though they were, there was a certain lack of spontaneity, a sense of studied effort about it all. Each was too apt to sink his own personal wishes in order to please the others. Trevannagh gave up cricket completely; Dick and Shannon abandoned their solitary reading for dialogue *à trois*. The college, which had already christened them the Triumvirate, changed their soubriquet to the Trinity, alleging that they were indivisible, and it became an established rag to recite the Athanasian Creed outside their rooms, special stress being laid on the "Three Incomprehensibles."

But man is born to Trouble, and even the Trevannaghs of this world cannot altogether escape. Though outwardly Douglas still presented his wonted lazy calm, his two friends knew him well enough to divine some latent anxiety.

"Eights Week" had come and gone—a memory of white muslin against a variety of backgrounds—the green lawns of the college, the black oak of the hall, the crimson cushions of a punt. These had been days of high festival and, by comparison, the week that succeeded them fell rather flat. As an antidote to this depression, Shannon suggested a supper picnic on the river. Trevannagh, alleging some mysterious appointment, had gone off for the afternoon, but it had been arranged that he was to meet them at Magdalen Bridge, with the hamper, about seven o'clock. In the meantime Dick and Shannon, having paddled up as far as the "rollers," were drifting back to the rendezvous, when Dick, who was lazily turning over the pages of some weekly magazines, gave vent to a startled exclamation. Shannon abandoned his occupation of pelting a water rat with cherry-stones and looked up.

"Have you read this?" asked Dick, holding out a paper which has achieved an unenviable notoriety by dealing in scurrilous innuendo.

"No," replied Shannon, sleepily. "Why?" He saw the expression of dismay on Dick's face and became suddenly alert. "What's the trouble?"

"You know the paper: it's the *Cries of London*. Listen. Heading: 'Questions we should like answered.' This is one of the questions: 'Whether the noble Lord from Cornwall knows how much time his son and heir spends with the little lady who sings so charmingly at the Pastelle Theatre. Whether it is true that he has presented her with a season ticket to Oxford. And what the lady's husband thinks about it all.'"

Shannon whistled. The reference was unmistakable.

"I never imagined that Betty was married?" said Dick.

"She probably isn't: still, it's possible."

For a few moments they sat in silence visualizing an encounter between Trevannagh and Betty's husband—a dark, unshaven man, Dick figured him, with a taste of alcohol and a talent for blasphemy. Douglas, at heart very much upset, would attempt a good-humoured apology, interlarded with many "Look here, you know's" and offers of money, while the man, in hope of securing a longer price, would make constant reference to the Divorce Court. It was not a pleasant prospect, and the ugliest part of the business lay in the fact that Trevannagh was so manifestly in the wrong.

Shannon jumped up and seized the punt-pole.

"Come on," he cried, "we're late as it is."

At Magdalen steps they found Trevannagh sitting on the hamper, smoking, and apparently at peace with all the world. He clambered into the punt and they pushed off.

"Your turn, Dick," said Shannon unconcernedly and handed the pole to him.

"And as these flannels have just been cleaned, don't splash more than you can help," Trevannagh implored.

As Dick did not answer, he looked up and caught the expression on his face. Then his glance fell on the offending paper, lying crumpled at his feet. He picked it up.

"I suppose you chaps have read this?" he said rather defiantly.

Shannon nodded.

"Well, you're leading lights of the Law School. Will an action lie for defamation of character?" continued Trevannagh with unsteady jauntiness. The other two did not answer and there was a long pause. Then, without further warning, Trevannagh broke down.

"My God, what a fool I've been," he cried, "what a fool."

He covered his face with his hands, unwilling that

they should see the misery in it, and for several minutes none of them spoke.

"Let's tie up here," said Dick at length.

In silence they disembarked and, making their way to a broken willow-tree, a favourite haunt of theirs, unpacked the hamper. But discussion of the matter could not be indefinitely postponed.

"Look here," said Trevannagh, breaking the silence, which had become irksome. "I've made my bed and I've got to lie on it. But there's no reason why you chaps should be worried."

"Don't be a fool, Duggie," replied Shannon. "What touches you, touches both of us."

"Nobody'll understand or take any notice of that paragraph in that damned rag," said Dick consolingly.

"I'm not worrying about that so much, but it's all over the clubs. I've become quite a celebrity." He smiled bitterly. "'That young fool who's running Betty Barrington.' That's what they call me. If she hadn't been developing into a London star I don't suppose they'd have worried."

"Or if you hadn't been the son of a lord," Dick interjected. "Sweet are the uses of obscurity."

"If we're going to be any use to you, Duggie," said Shannon, "you'd better put all your cards on the table. What attitude does Betty take up?"

Trevannagh seemed to be struggling against a loyalty that demanded silence.

"You swear it won't go any further?"

"Of course."

"I oughtn't to tell you. But I've been such a rotter that one step lower doesn't count." He fumbled in his pocket and produced several letters. "You may as well hear all the documents in the case." He laughed harshly. "This is Betty's little effort. No beginning, you know—she plunges straight into the matter; 'I

thought I could trust you, but apparently your only wish was to ruin me. I blame myself for not having discovered sooner what a cad you were. Writing "honourable" in front of your name doesn't make you a gentleman.' That's damn true," he commented, with a miserable attempt at a smile. "'I suppose you had to go round all the clubs, bragging about your conquest.' She spells bragging with one 'g': that'll please you, Julian, you always said she was illiterate. There's another page of this sort of stuff which is merely humiliating to read and doesn't help much, and then she ends up like this: 'If my husband takes divorce proceedings, as he threatens to do, you will know what to do, that is, if you have any spark of decency left, which I doubt.' That last phrase seems to have been stuck in as an afterthought. Now then, Julian, here's your chance: go on and say 'I told you so,' " he concluded with a sneer.

"You wouldn't say that if you weren't half mad," said Shannon quietly.

"I'm sorry, old chap. I always knew, of course, that you two would stick by me. I won't read you the other letters from Betty: some are like that one and others are in a sentimental vein. But there's one from her husband—a fellow called Button. Betty Button. My God! It's polite and official and sarcastic and he always uses 'very' where he obviously means 'bloody.' The gist of the thing is that he intends to divorce Betty and is going to cite me as 'Co.' Then there's a letter in the same strain from a little swine of a solicitor, who lives somewhere off Leicester Square. That's the little lot I'm up against. What am I going to do?"

"Do?" said Shannon, "you're going to have a drink." There was a pop and the cork flew past Dick's ear. "Give us some glasses."

Trevannagh laughed. "I don't somehow think I'll drink her health."

"I suppose you've got over your infatuation at last?" Shannon asked.

"Well, you know, it's rather difficult to say." He scratched the back of his head, which was the nearest approach to a gesture that he ever committed. "I'm fond of her in a way, of course. But then we've had a row, you know, when she came up about a fortnight ago. Accused me of bragging all over London that she was—well—my mistress. I swore I hadn't, but it wasn't a bit of good. Then when she came up last Saturday she sprang this husband of hers on me. That's the first I heard of him. You remember she wouldn't come on the river. Well, I had three hours' steady invective. As if it was my fault that she was married! And she never wore a wedding-ring either," he concluded upon a note of grievance.

"D'you think she's still keen about you?" Shannon seemed determined to get every conceivable light on the subject.

"Oh, chuck it, Julian. You're just like a third-rate barrister with his first brief, and God knows I shall get plenty of that sort of thing later on. Besides, I'm hungry. Come out, you brute!" He excavated the claw of a lobster with judgment and relish.

Dick was amazed. Five minutes ago Trevannagh had been in the depths of misery. Yet here he was now, with all sorts of unpleasant possibilities hanging over his head, as cheerful as though nothing had happened. With Shannon's mercurial temperament such sudden changes were frequent, but that Douglas the imperturbable should rush from one extreme to the other was incredible. Dick looked at the bottle and was reassured to find it still more than half full.

"That's the spirit," he said.

"You know all this is really your fault, Julian," Trevannagh continued. "Dick and I have been trying to

emulate your example and become passion-worn men of the world, when we've hardly got the marks of the cradle off us. We're all precocious and I've got to pay the penalty for the lot of us."

"Don't talk rot. Be serious for a moment. The point is, what's to be done?"

"There's nothing to be done."

"Oh, Lord!" cried Shannon, who had been studying Trevannagh's face. "You aren't going to do what is called the 'straight thing' by the girl? You're not going to let her be divorced and then marry her?"

Seeing his worst suspicions confirmed, he became more agitated. "You can't mean to do that. It's monstrous! Why, my God——" For once words failed him.

"I don't see any other way out. If people call it doing the straight thing, I suppose it *is* the straight thing. I can't let her suffer through a fault of mine."

"You're talking like a fool," Shannon told him. "The thing's bad enough as it is. For Heaven's sake, don't make it worse by being quixidiotic."

"If my scandal hasn't done anything else, it has at least enriched the British language with a new word," remarked Trevannagh sarcastically.

"Julian's quite right," Dick urged. "It's no use trying to play the heavy hero. In books, I know, one either marries the girl or enlists in the Army."

"I'll be hanged if I enlist," said Trevannagh, thereby throwing a gage to Fate.

"Let's look at the business from a common-sense point of view," Shannon suggested. "I think I've got to the bottom of it. Betty's got two strings to her bow. She'll either have you and a title, which I expect is what she'd prefer, or she'll get as much money out of you as she can. I suppose she's had quite a lot already?" Trevannagh nodded. "The idea of marriage is quite preposterous. You must write an express letter to your

father to-night and put the whole thing before him. He'll probably be able to keep the matter out of the Courts, and as long as it doesn't go there, the authorities up here aren't likely to do anything."

"That's the best course," Dick agreed. "Let's get back and write that letter."

For a moment Trevannagh looked genuinely concerned.

"What, with three inches in the bottle?" he demanded.

However, on the way home his despondent mood returned, and the sight of King Alfred's, silent and austere in the moonlight, completed his depression. At Shannon's dictation, he wrote and dispatched the letter to his father, but there remained much to be done in the way of enlightening his orthodoxy. He still insisted that, whatever happened, he must do exactly as Betty commanded. He blamed himself immensely. For some reason, quite inexplicable, his code of honour provided no other course. Far into the night Shannon wrestled with him, producing a multiplicity of arguments and, though he would have been ashamed to own it, obviously enjoying himself. He discarded the rôle of the middle-aged cynic to assume that of Jonathan. He quoted the Bible and Bernard Shaw. He conjured him with tears in his eyes to renounce the devil and all her works for the sake of the family honour. He professed a deep knowledge of the intricacies of the feminine mind. "You see," he said, "in a day or two you'll get another letter from Betty, overflowing with milk and honey. She'll appeal to your chivalry and implore you to stand by her. She'll tell you that it isn't the thought of divorce that is driving her mad, but the fear of losing you. You see if I'm not right, and then, perhaps, you'll believe me. I know the way these women go on. *Le peu que sont les femmes.*" And looking very knowing indeed, he blew a smoke-ring across the room by way of emphasizing his point.

These dialectics silenced Trevannagh, if they did not

convince him. "Wait and see what happens. I've been a fool, but that's no reason why I should be more of a cad than I am now.—No!" he said wearily as Shannon, having conscripted one of Æsop's fables, was returning to the attack.

"I'm only trying to stop you from making a bigger fool of yourself than you've done already." He turned to Dick. "'Tis an awkward thing to play with souls and matter enough——"

Dick, who knew the quotation, cut him short. "Yes; quite so," he said.

"Well, well," yawned Shannon. "A prophet is not without honour. I'm for bed."

Dick returned to his rooms profoundly perplexed. To him it seemed that he was the only one of the three really upset by the business. After one passionate outburst, Douglas had recovered his equanimity and now showed a disposition to be bored by the whole thing. Dick supposed that at heart he was very worried, but his emotional laziness having reasserted itself prevented any traces from reaching the surface. As for Shannon, he had indeed been helpful and energetic, but he had merely seized the chance to preach his favourite sermon, on the text "The woman tempted me and I did eat." That it happened to be apposite was the sole measure of his helpfulness. And yet Dick had no doubt that Shannon felt miserable about the whole thing. Why on earth should they all hide their feelings? At any rate, he, Dick, was not going to deceive himself or anybody else. He was acutely unhappy: he was wretched. And having reached this conclusion, he fell placidly asleep.

For a week Trevannagh, in Shannon's phrase, "walked in the shadow of the Divorce Court," but at the end of that week Lord Kinthorpe's solicitors pronounced him to be out of danger. The man Button was expensively pacified and Miss Barrington was also invited to dry her

tears with a handsome cheque. But, if legally the matter was stillborn, socially it thrived as an authentic child of scandal. The *Cries of London* followed up its questions with an article in which the immorality of the peerage and the stage were somehow connected with the German menace and the increase of socialism. The writer was both witty and moral and all doubts as to the identity of the parties concerned were resolved by the use of initials and asterisks.

Trevannagh's friends at Oxford for the most part affected ignorance, and he could afford to despise the sneer of those who condemned a folly which they had not the courage to imitate. The anger of his family was the strongest force with which he had to contend. His father refused to see him and an ill-timed reminder that a somewhat similar incident had adorned his own youth only served to aggravate his displeasure. Under these trials, Douglas remained wonderfully calm and detached.

"I don't mind," he said, "as long as you two stick by me. I deserve all this and the devil of a lot more."

But, if Trevannagh had to bear what disgrace there was, his friends did not altogether escape the consequences. A few days after the appearance of the article in the *Cries of London*, Dick received a letter from Mrs. Effingham.

"My dear Dick," she wrote: she called him Dick now—with reservations. "We have all been very distressed about your friend, Mr. Trevannagh, though I for one was not altogether surprised. I suppose there can be no doubt that what one hears is true. Both he and Mr. Shannon struck me, I confess, as rather dangerous young men. Evil communications corrupt good manners, and unless you promise me that you will have no further dealings with them, I cannot permit your intimacy with Lois to continue. Your own good sense, I trust, has already rendered this warning needless. I have talked the matter over with my husband and he entirely endorses my opinion. Before

I allow Lois to come up to Oxford for Commemoration"—(abbreviations struck Mrs. Effingham as a sort of meanness and she never indulged in them)—“I must be sure that she will not be called upon to associate with Mr. Trevannagh. I must insist upon an immediate answer, as Lois wishes to buy some new frocks for the dances.

“I trust that your mother is well. Yours sincerely, May Effingham.”

This letter arrived while Dick and Shannon were at breakfast; Trevannagh, who was as extravagant with time as he was with money, had not yet appeared. Dick read it out but made no comment.

“I knew the old cat always hated me,” remarked Shannon. It was characteristic that the slight to him was the first aspect to strike him. “Just because Duggie and I didn’t fall immediate victims to Lois, she thinks we must be dangerous young men. I like that bit about talking it over with her husband. Can’t you see the old boy trying to keep his cigar alight in a tempest of words?”

But the humorous side of the letter had not yet occurred to Dick. “I shan’t stay up for Commem. now,” he said gloomily.

“Nonsense. You can tell the old woman that Lois won’t meet us. She’s not coming up herself—is she? Your mother will be doing the chaperon work and she won’t give you away. And Lois isn’t likely to.”

“No, I can’t do that. But for the Lord’s sake don’t say anything to Duggie about it.”

A moment later Trevannagh entered and began peering under the dishes for his breakfast.

“Mushrooms and scrambled eggs—a happy thought,” he declared. “Why the impersonation of the king-who-never-smiled-again, Dickie?”

“He’s just had a letter from Ma Effingham to say that Lois can’t manage to come up for Commem. after all,” said Shannon. “They’ve made other arrangements and

she can't be spared. Hence—Hence loathed melancholy—on the part of Dick.”

“ Oh, really. Rotten luck,” said Trevannagh unsuspiciously.

In reply to Mrs. Effingham, Dick wrote a letter, boyish and impulsive, yet not lacking a certain dignity. He was not in the habit of deserting his friends in their misfortunes and, however great his disappointment, he could not purchase pleasure at the price she demanded. It was all rather stilted and theatrical, but it expressed determination and seemed to Dick to be the supreme sacrifice upon the altar of friendship. For a few weeks, with the Wimbledon Post Office as confidant, he maintained communication with Lois and even felt a certain thrill at the clandestine character of their correspondence. But when Lois went without warning on a visit to Scotland, her letters ceased abruptly and some of Dick's most ardent effusions remained in the permanent custody of the Wimbledon Post Office.

From his mother, Dick received a letter somewhat in the same strain as Mrs. Effingham's, but written more in sorrow than in anger. However, what she lost in vindictiveness she regained in Christian resignation. Undoubtedly she was suffering mental martyrdom, and she blamed herself for not having discovered Douglas's character in time. She began rather unexpectedly by remarking that the Divorce Court was the ante-room of Hell—a phrase whose paternity Dick was inclined to attribute to the vicar. She then proceeded to quote the Seventh Commandment correctly and appositely. . . . It was a long, rather silly letter, full of a vague piety and a vaguer sympathy. It seemed as though her natural womanly pity was unable to escape the narrow bonds of Anglican prudery, and though glad that the matter had not been thrashed out in the Courts, she was of opinion that Douglas would have to pay more dearly for this omission in the next world. Her postscript was characteristic of the whole letter :

"Tell Douglas that I am deeply sorry for him and that I pray for him"—a message which remained undelivered. One paragraph in particular offended Dick. "It pains me very much," she wrote, "to think that you must have met this abandoned woman. I shudder when I think that even I might have been unknowingly introduced to her and have shaken her hand. I do not think I should ever have respected myself again."

Unmindful of the duty that he owed to his mother, Dick replied bitterly, scathingly. "There is a greater virtue than chastity—charity. Learn it," he wrote. "You, who read your Bible so carefully, do not seem to remember the story of Mary Magdalen and of the woman taken in adultery." Mrs. Goodall was shocked to the roots of her Anglican conscience. "Your blasphemous reference to Saint Mary Magdalen in connexion with that woman has upset me more than I can say. It is only too clear that you are drifting away from the Rock of Faith into the Sea of Unbelief." In reply, Dick gibed at the time-worn metaphors of the Church and, as a final cut, added that he would not be coming home for the summer vacation. And so, for several weeks, mother and son lapsed into a bitter silence. She knew that if she confided the trouble to her husband, he would immediately bring things to a head by cutting off Dick's allowance, and, true to her principles, she preferred to carry her cross alone, explaining the absence of Dick's letters by suggesting that he was working.

While hiding these matters from Trevannagh, Dick told Shannon everything.

"An expensive friendship," he said. "First of all, I lose Lois and now I've quarrelled with my mother. And the whole trouble is that I'm not at all sure that I'm doing right."

Shannon laughed. "It's a test, Dickie. Someday you'll know that you've done right."

"I don't know what these cryptic sayings mean," said Dick, and then, after a pause: "If I can't go home, I suppose Duggie certainly can't. We'll have to spend the long vac. together. What about you?"

"I've got several schemes in my head. Let's find Duggie and talk it over." And they sent George, the scout, to serve a subpoena on Trevannagh.

"About this long vac.?" said Dick, as he entered.

"Well?"

"I've had a bit of a row with my people, and I'm not very keen on going home, and I expect you're hardly prodigal enough yet to cause the fatted calf any uneasiness."

Trevannagh perceived the drift of the conversation.

"Not Spain," he said hastily.

"You're not staying up for Commem.?" asked Dick.

"Well, I don't want to, but if you two chaps——"

"No," said Dick. "No."

"And, you, Julian?"

"Well, my young sister was coming up, but she won't have anyone to dance with if you two are going down."

Both Dick and Trevannagh were interested. They had never met Shannon's sister, and indeed he rarely referred to her. She had been educated abroad, so much they knew, and in spite of Shannon's disparaging comments, they imagined her to be a girl of astounding accomplishments and almost legendary beauty. She spoke five languages, they had been told, and a few snapshots had hinted at something quite out of the ordinary.

"Well," said Dick, wavering.

"Perhaps she's rather young," said Shannon. "She'll only get a swollen head if she comes up here, and besides, I'm not very keen on dances. We'll take her to Henley instead."

From this the idea of a house on the river developed at once.

After much correspondence, conducted by Shannon

in the nicest legal phraseology, they had the good fortune to secure for a period of two months all that messuage known as "The Willows." Situated between Pangbourne and Goring, it was a low, picturesque, ivy-clad building with lattice-windows and quaint, inconsequential gables. Obviously it had once been a small cottage, but the modern additions had preserved its essential characteristics. The new wing did not dominate the old; it somehow harmonized with and completed it and was, in fact, not so much an addition as an inevitable growth. The interior of the house was equally delightful. The oaken-raftered ceilings sloped away into unexpected corners and there were vast, unnecessary cupboards, which had all the mystery of secret chambers, while the furniture, manifestly the result of systematic collection, was old without being rickety. Moreover, included in the lease were two punts, a miscellaneous assortment of livestock—and Mrs. Marripatch.

Mrs. Marripatch was a buxom woman of the type known as motherly, and having christened one of her own children "Dick," she soon developed a strong attachment for the less distinguished bearer of that name, behaving in effect more like an old nurse than a housekeeper. As they soon discovered, she had a talent for gossip, and could impart quite a flavour of scandal to an observation about the weather, and when her vocabulary, which was somewhat limited, gave out, she fell back upon explanatory noises, her inflexions of the monosyllable "um" being capable of expressing any note in the emotional octave. A woman of few reticences, she delighted in narrating the more intimate details of her nine confinements and the methods she had adopted in rearing her family—altogether a wonderful old lady, who harmonized perfectly with the house and the furniture.

Their landlord had apparently a catholic taste in animals. There were three cats, assorted, a mongrel bull-dog, which

led a continental life, eternally chained up, a couple of hens, which had profitably retired from the egg-laying business, and a fluctuating number of rabbits, whose tendency to rapid increase was checked by constant murder and escape. A daily "sweep" on the number of rabbits soon became an established sport.

One morning, a few days after their arrival, Dick, who possessed the qualified virtue of rising earlier than the others, yawningly descended, and having counted the number of rabbits with a feeling of false prophecy, sat down to breakfast. Five minutes later, Shannon and Trevannagh, likewise yawning, appeared on the scene.

"Late, as usual," said Dick.

"Punctuality is the prose of time, lateness its poetry," replied Shannon.

"I wish you wouldn't do that sort of thing at breakfast, Julian," Trevannagh complained. "It goes much better with port than with tea."

"It wouldn't mean any more at dinner than it does at breakfast . . . you're half-way through, Dickie, so read us the news, while we deal with the ham."

Lazily Dick opened the paper and cleared his throat for action. "The Archduke Francis Ferdinand has been assassinated at Sera—some place or other in the Balkans." He spelt it out—"S-e-r-a-j-e-v-o."

"Serayevo," said Shannon with authority. "Still, murders in remote places like that don't interest me. Now Crippen, for example——"

"Oh, dry up, Julian," Trevannagh interrupted. "What did Hobbs notch yesterday, Dickie?"

CHAPTER VIII

FOR a few days the explosion at Serajevo echoed in the headlines of the papers, jostling for space with the Cailloux trial and the developments of the Irish question, and finally giving way to these matters of more permanent import. To banish such trivialities from the minds of Dick and his friends came the Regatta and with it Dolores Shannon. Arrayed in flannels with awful neatness and uniformity, the trio went down to meet her at the local station, Shannon dissimulating his brotherly pride in a pretty sister and the other two frankly curious.

At eighteen, Dolores Shannon was as mature as an English girl of twenty-four. There was nothing school-girlish about her, and she possessed that exotic type of beauty which makes so strong an appeal to Englishmen. Dark, like her brother, with languorous eyes and a full, rather sensual mouth, she had the quality of turning even the commonplace into romance. Having heard a good deal about Dick and Trevannagh from her brother's fragmentary correspondence, she had already decided to try and make both of them fall in love with her.

"Why haven't you brought a chaperon? I told you to," demanded Shannon with a rare touch of austerity.

"My dear boy, chaperons went out with crinolines," she replied, and Dick felt that, knowing the brother, he knew the sister.

"I've heard such lots about you two from Julian,"

she continued in a voice, shy yet infinitely provocative, and Dick decided that he didn't know her at all.

"All the same, it's jolly bad form to be seen in a punt with three men, even though one of them is your brother," Shannon proceeded to elaborate his complaint.

"Oh, don't spoil my day. If you want to preserve the conventions, you'd better wear a placard with 'This girl is my sister' on it. I've been simply dying to meet Mr. Trevannagh and Mr. Goodall, and I'm going to enjoy myself enormously, so don't try and play the heavy brother."

"I think you'd better call us Dick and Douglas," Trevannagh suggested. "You're sure to get to it, sooner or later."

"Don't you think it would be more exciting to work up to that?"

In addressing himself and Trevannagh, Dick noticed that she affected a very slight foreign accent, though in speaking to her brother her English was as pure as their own. She had already found that accent effective.

"I've arranged with a chap who's got a motor launch to tow us up to Henley. You'll probably get splashed pretty badly, Dol, but no matter. So we'll get straight along to his boat-house, unless you want to refine the lily by powdering your nose."

"Really, Julian! These secrets of the feminine toilet!" Dolores protested. "Of course, my nose is quite perfect, isn't it, Mr. Goodall? Let's get along to your old punt, and I hope you've got some nice chocolates—with liqueurs inside."

Arrived at Henley, they kept in mid-stream at Trevannagh's request. He had no wish to mingle with the crowds at Phyllis Court and Leander, where he was bound to meet friends, who might either cut him or, worse still, favour him with a knowing wink of condonation. With considerable craft, he managed to get Dolores at his end

of the punt and to carry on a low-voiced, exclusive conversation with her, while Dick and Shannon were left to their own devices. The thought that Lois was probably at one of the clubs under alien escort made Dick disinclined for talk. Several times he imagined that he saw her. . . .

"Henley is perhaps the most brilliant and picturesque function of the season . . . society set in the twin elements of land and water . . . England at its best." The words of a "leader" he had read that morning ran through his mind and the last phrase in particular stuck there. "England at its best." Was this really the best that England could do? Just dress up, quite immaculately, of course, to watch a few trained athletes. Dick was one of those energetic, rather aggressive people who like to do things themselves and not to watch others do them: every time that he visited a cricket or polo-match, he would declaim against the baseness of the spectator's rôle. And yet, like the others, he went. But to-day he was feeling more than usually bitter and the lazy serenity of the scene aggravated his mood.

"All this; it's so splendid, so idle, so futile," he said to Shannon. "I've got a sort of feeling that it can't go on indefinitely. It's all too pleasant to be permanent. We've ceased to be a nation of actors and have become a nation of spectators. Like Rome. Yes, I know I'm talking rot, but I've got one of your presentiments to-day. I feel thunder in the air."

Shannon looked up in surprise, but he was not going to let slip a chance for argument.

"You've got Balkanitis, Dickie. You've been listening to the 'People who Really Know.' That chap, Warden, for example, who's staying at the Arms. Last night he told me in a whisper—'People who Really Know' always whisper—that the European situation was very grave, very grave indeed: Balkans, the pulse of Europe, and the pulse beating at fever heat—and all that sort of rubbish.

Don't you worry, old chap, the only war we're likely to see is the Carso-Redmond—just a local affair."

"With no ulterior motive," said Dick with a sense of potential plagiarism. Dolores, who had been listening to the conversation, laughed.

"Bravo, Mr. Goodall! I was afraid you were going to be dreadfully solemn, which is a serious crime at Henley, but I believe you're really quite amusing. I'm going to change places with Julian in a moment and find out, as Mr. Trevannagh is behaving disgracefully."

"Oh, I say, Miss Shannon," protested the accused. "Don't believe her, Julian. If she wasn't your sister, I should——" He took refuge in a grimace. "Besides, it's no good talking to Dick. The poor lad is in the throes of a hopeless love affair."

"If it comes to that——" began Dick, rather nettled, and then thinking better of it, stopped.

"You ought to have brought that chaperon," said Shannon. "You're sure to do something outrageous before the day's over. And how you're going to get back to town by yourself this evening, heaven only knows. You've been so little in England that I suppose you don't know how to behave when you are there. If you set Dick and Duggie at loggerheads, I'll throw you overboard and let you swim home."

"Julian, darling, you talk like some one out of Jane Austen. You'd look a perfect angel with side-whiskers and knee-breeches—except, of course, that your calves are a wee bit on the thin side."

"Grr," groaned Shannon. "Give the girl a chocolate—one of those caramel ones—and stop her talking."

On the whole the day was a great success. When the races were over, the same Good Samaritan towed them home, where awaited them an elaborate supper, at which Mrs. Marripatch acted as servant, chaperon and admiring audience.

"As pretty as paint and as clever," she observed afterwards to Dick. "I never thought as how I should like foreigners, but there's something about 'er——"

"She isn't a foreigner," said Dick indignantly.

"Um," Mrs. Marripatch was dubious.

"She's Mr. Shannon's sister, you know, and you wouldn't call him a foreigner, would you?"

"Well, anyway, she's a duck," Mrs. Marripatch conceded generously. "Such 'igh spirits, too! When she went up to wash her 'ands an' all, nothing 'ud stop her from 'aving a look at your room and Mr. Trevannagh's. An' she would put your 'airbrushes in you beds, too, but I fished 'em out arterwards. 'Orseplay, I don't 'old with."

In spite of Julian's protests, Dolores succeeded in missing every train except the last and even spoke recklessly of staying the night. However, Julian managed to shepherd her down in time for the eleven o'clock train and she consented to be packed into a compartment with a middle-aged clergyman. They were rather surprised at this acquiescence, until she leaned out of the window and confided to them in a loud whisper, that, from her experience, the Church needed less encouragement to flirt than any other body of men.

"What d'you think of Dol?" asked Shannon as they strolled back from the station.

"Charming," replied Dick sincerely but without enthusiasm. Lois had left an impression too deep to be readily effaced.

"She's—she's great," Trevannagh declared after vainly searching for more definite adjectives. "Though, God knows, I've no right even to talk to a decent girl," he continued gloomily. "If she knew about Betty she'd never speak to me."

"Rot. She'd like you all the better for it. I think I'll tell her. As it was I thought she seemed a little *éprise*."

"Don't talk drivel," cried Trevannagh, blushing furiously.

"She's caught him on the rebound," said Shannon, laughing. "Another scalp for Dol—and a curly one at that."

Soon after Dolores' visit, Von Ecke came down to spend a few days with them, and it was during his stay that the Austrian ultimatum to Servia was issued. They did not possess the political vision to see in it more than a local squabble, but the sensational prophecies in some of the papers provided them with excellent matter for ragging Von Ecke.

"Well, my lad, the European War is coming at last," said Dick. "The conflagration is bound to spread and become international unless it is immediately extinguished with the cold water of common sense," he quoted from an evening paper.

"I do not think so," replied Von Ecke seriously, to their intense delight. "It will be Agadir all over again. Germany and Austria will boast about their wonderful armies and guns. Russia will point out the millions she can put in the field; France will talk about the spirit of Napoleon and you English will invoke Nelson and brag about your fleet. And then every one will go to sleep again."

"You think that the pen is mightier than the sword, so that there's no need to draw the latter while the inkpot is full," Shannon suggested.

"Precisely," replied Von Ecke with the grateful air of a man rediscovering a long-lost metaphor.

"Nonsense," Dick maintained. "There's going to be war between England and Germany, and I'm afraid our duty to our country compels us to do Von Ecke in at once." He stropped the carving-knife ostentatiously on the ham.

"I don't think that I shall ever comprehend you English," said Von Ecke. "You make a joke of everything." He sought essential differences. "And your

manners, for example : I admit that they are perfect, but then they are so free and easy : there is no punctiliousness. Yours is a courtesy in bedroom slippers." With the German this was apparently a long-standing complaint against a country which does not appreciate continental bows.

"Anyway, that's better than yours—a courtesy in top-boots," retorted Trevannagh and helped himself to a congratulatory drink.

"There will be no war," said Von Ecke with an air of finality. But a day or two later he was summoned to his Consulate in London, and certain matters were there divulged to him which caused him to modify his opinion. He returned to Pangbourne to find Dick and Shannon playing a single at tennis, while Trevannagh was trying to teach the bulldog to field the balls.

"Hullo," shouted Shannon. "Go and change and we'll have a four. "That's five-three, Dickie, and my service. so it's more or less a foregone conclusion."

"No," said Von Ecke, "you do not comprehend. There is to be a mobilization immediately in Germany. Something has happened and I must at once go away." He was manifestly excited and a German accent had crept into his usually perfect English. Indeed, in some indefinable way, he seemed to have become suddenly Teutonic, and to have lost the veneer of English manners. More noticeably, he had visited a German barber, and his hair, which had previously been allowed to grow after the English fashion, was now cut "en brosse." "I must at once go away," he repeated.

"Don't be an ass," said Dick. He had been accustomed to regard Von Ecke less as a German than as a fellow-undergraduate and could not imagine that he was bound by obligations that did not affect himself.

"Explain," suggested Trevannagh.

"I cannot tell you much. I have visited the Consulate

and they have told me to return to Germany. I do not think that it is war, but I shall have to go. Even if there is war, they tell me that England will not be touched. It is indeed fortunate to live on an island."

"Well, I'm damned," said Dick, voicing the opinion of the others. They felt irritated, jealous.

"What about France?" asked Shannon.

"I do not know: it may be that France will fight, but for my part I think it will all come to nothing." He became suddenly angry. "What is this Servia? An affair of comic opera!"

"If France fights, I shall try and enlist in the Foreign Legion," Shannon announced. "I'm not going to be left out of any war that happens to be going. Come into the house and tell us all about it over a whisky-and-soda."

"Dear old Pontius Pilate has picked up a ball at last," shouted Trevannagh, who had strolled away during the conversation. "He's probably bitten a hole in it. . . . Oh, yes! About this war." And he followed the others into the house.

But Von Ecke was not disposed to be communicative. He confined himself to denunciations of Servia and to repeating that he must go. Finally he went upstairs to pack.

"Let's see: it was five, three, and your service," said Dick rather elaborately.

Conversation at supper was somewhat strained. In the character of a soldier about to fight for his country, Von Ecke was an unknown quantity. Trevannagh's remark, "You lucky devil, but we'll be there too somehow," was symptomatic of their common feelings. That England would enter into the war did not strike them as a serious proposition, but they were aridly determined not to be left out of any war that happened to be going.

The German left by the evening train amid awkward but none the less sincere expressions of good-will. Every

one tried hard to find the right thing to say, until, after several clumsy efforts, they all burst out laughing.

"War is, I suppose, very terrible," said Von Ecke. "But also it is very funny. Still, even now, I do not think it will be anything. But one cannot say what may happen. Damn Servia—yes—and Austria too! I have enjoyed myself very much and it is not pleasant to leave under such circumstances. Still, l'homme propose——"

"Et l'empereur dispose," said Dick. "So long, old chap."

The days which followed his departure were rich in events. Once Russia had declared her intention of supporting Servia, Europe rushed to arms without, it seemed, any serious attempts at mediation. Kings and ministers tried to intervene, but their voices were drowned in the general clamour for war. Now was the chance for the minorities in England, the suffragettes and the Ulstermen, and yet with an obscure but admirable and wholly British sense of sportsmanship, they refused to seize it. By the end of July it seemed that England, from being an interested spectator, was becoming at least a potential combatant. Dick was reminded of a lot of small boys picking up sides to play football: Germany, in the character of the school bully, was telling Italy what would happen to him if he didn't throw in his lot with himself and Austria, while France, the spoilt boy of the school, was imploring England, almost with tears in his eyes, to back him up. The monstrous fact that a bomb thrown on a Sunday in remote Servia should serve to set the Triple Alliance and the Triple Entente at each other's throats was obscured by the larger issues of patriotism and racial hatred. And yet it needed only a sane majority with counsels of compromise to avert the immense catastrophe. But the habit of bragging is too deep-rooted in European politics.

"Another ultimatum," proclaimed Trevannagh one morning, as he opened the paper: "Ultimata, express or

implied by aggressive mobilization, are the order of the day.' They're as——"

"Thick as autumnal leaves that strew the brooks in Vallombrosa," suggested Shannon.

"Or as common as tailors' bills," said Trevannagh, who was not going to be done out of his simile. "The old Kaiser's sending round account rendered to all his European clients."

There was a pause, and then Shannon looked up from the letter he was reading.

"I suppose I ought to tell you chaps that my guv'nor's ruined," he said with studied unconcern. "He put every sou he had into a company that was trying to exploit Servia—boring for oil and all that sort of thing. Thought he was going to make a fortune out of it, poor old chap! There were two split infinitives in the prospectus and I warned the old man against it on that account, but he swore they were a guarantee of good faith. Now, with this cursed war, the whole damn thing's gone smash—not that I ever thought there was much in it. Give the marmalade a fair wind, Dickie."

For a moment the other two thought that he was joking, but with their knowledge of his character they soon decided that he was really in earnest. An elaborate carelessness in announcing important truths was his favourite affectation; had a doctor sentenced him to death, he would have lightly mentioned the fact between an observation on the weather and an invitation to play tennis.

"Good God," cried Dick. "You don't really mean it."

"I do; every penny we've got has gone in that blasted company. It's damn rough on the old boy and Dol and, of course, it's not too pleasant for me. No more Oxford or anything like that. Still, it's no use crying over milk, spilt or otherwise: there's enough water in it, as it is. I believe it would be a relief to you two if I flung myself on

the floor, tore my hair and bit the carpet, but I don't intend to oblige. Poor old guv'nor. It takes a clever man to be a complete fool at business."

Dick realized that Shannon was genuinely enjoying the effect of his announcement. The disaster to his father had given him a splendid chance of displaying what he was pleased to call dramatic restraint and it was manifest that he intended to make the most of it.

"Look here, Julian," said Trevannagh. "That's all drivel about your going down for good from Oxford. I'm becoming quite indecently wealthy, through the death of remote aunts, and though, of course, I'm not quite the blue-eyed boy that I was at home, the guv'nor's awfully fond of you and'll do anything he can to help. It's no good pretending to be proud and talking about sponging on your friends. I should come down on you, if our positions were reversed."

"Who's talking about pride? I'd accept with pleasure, Duggie, only, as it happens, there's going to be a war."

"Damn it, I'd forgotten the war."

"And anyway," Shannon continued, "I couldn't very well live in luxury at Oxford on your money, while the guv'nor and Dol were on their 'uppers.'"

"I hadn't forgotten Dol," murmured Trevannagh.

"However, just to show you I'm not proud, I'll stay on here as your guest, until things are more settled."

As Shannon pointed out that the discussion of his poverty bored him, the subject was dropped and the conversation swung back to the prospect of war. From the confusion of proposals and counter-proposals, one salient fact emerged: Germany was bent upon war—war at any price. Under this determination, events were marching rapidly to the desired issue. Von Ecke's rules for European politics had failed. He had assumed that both sides, while quite willing to brag and bully, were too afraid of each other to fight. It seemed now that they were too afraid not to fight.

By the first of August there was no longer room for doubt in any reasonable mind. Fighting had broken out along the Russian frontier and it was inevitable that France would be involved in a few hours. Feeling literally and metaphorically in a backwater, the three friends decided to go to London for the day, Dick and Trevannagh being anxious for news at first hand, and Shannon, though equally anxious, on the plea of transacting business with his father. He refused to acknowledge that the chance of war in any way excited him and, though he talked of little else, he mentioned it in a detached and impersonal way as though it could have no possible bearing upon his own future.

Owing to the eccentricities of Trevannagh's car, they did not reach London till the afternoon, and the time between their arrival and dinner was devoted by Shannon to visiting his family. At seven o'clock they reassembled in Piccadilly Circus.

"Where shall we dine?" asked Dick.

"Let's try the Café du Midi," suggested Shannon. "It ought to be rather amusing."

This prophecy proved to be right. The place when they arrived was in an uproar, the dominant motif of which was the Marseillaise. The proprietor was celebrating the evening by speaking exclusively in his native language—a performance which Shannon rightly read as an exhibition of patriotism. On their entry he told them with many disclaiming shrugs that the company was entirely French and hinted that, unless England had actually ranged herself alongside her ally, he could not answer for their reception.

But Shannon swept these warnings aside.

"Of course England will fight," he said. "And besides, even if she does not, I and my friends are going to enlist in the French army."

This announcement was overheard by a party near the

door, who cheered enthusiastically and passed on the information with embellishments, until it was generally understood that England had actually declared war on Germany, chiefly owing to the influence and efforts of Shannon and his friends. It was a great evening and the excitement reached its climax with the dramatic appearance of Mlle. Billy. It was one of M. le Patron's maxims that in a restaurant such as his, a pretty face was as essential as a good cook. Mlle. Billy supplied this need and was, on her own confession, the niece of the proprietor, though many were disposed to cast doubt upon this relationship. Clad simply and apparently solely in a large tricolour, she entered suddenly from the kitchen and, leaping upon a table, recited the Marseillaise with inspiring and audacious gestures. It was superb. Standing perilously upon her table, she was carried in procession round the room while M. le Patron made impartial additions to every one's bill for broken crockery.

They started home about eleven o'clock and had completed half their journey, when the engine suddenly began to miss. Trevannagh tried his favourite expedient of racing the engine and then letting in the clutch with a jerk, but the missing continued, until finally the car came to a standstill. Each of them applied a somewhat elementary knowledge of mechanics in vain, until Trevannagh bethought himself of examining the petrol tank. He gave a low whistle and scratched his head.

"Why is my car like the Queen of Sheba," he demanded, brightening suddenly.

"Eh," said Dick, who was trying to extract a spanner, which he had dropped, from an intimate part of the engine.

"Because there is no more spirit in her," said Trevannagh, immensely pleased with himself, and lit a pipe.

"What are we going to do?" asked Shannon.

"Nothing, my lad: we'll have to sit here till morning

or until a benevolent motorist comes along, who'll sell us some petrol."

After a few mutual recriminations they settled down to their vigil. It seemed incredible that a main road should be so lonely. For a full hour nothing passed them, and then in the distance a pair of rather dim lamps were seen slowly approaching. These belonged to a motor-lorry, with a couple of soldiers on the front seat, who, in response to a shout from Trevannagh, halted their vehicle.

"Petrol," demanded Trevannagh.

"Petrol," repeated one of the men, with the puzzled air of a barmaid who has been asked for an unknown cocktail. "What d'you say, Digger?"

Digger disclaimed responsibility by expectorating in a non-committal manner.

"If you'd said biscuits . . ." continued the first man, as one who offers a generous alternative. "We can't give you no petrol, it's against orders, and anyway we ain't got any to spare."

He was about to leave them, when the man addressed as Digger intervened :

"Might ask 'em where we are, Bob. Lost the convoy owing to a ruddy breakdown," he added by way of explanation.

"You're on the Bath road," said Dick. "Where d'you want to get to?"

This innocent offer of help aroused the first man's suspicions.

"Ow do we know 'oo you are?" he demanded. "All we arsed to know was where we are. You sez on the Bath road. That's all we want. Chuck us the map, Digger."

Shannon laughed. "I assure you we aren't spies."

"No offence, sir," said Digger. "But we 'as to be careful. That's our orders. 'Ave nothin' ter do with strangers," the captin said, and we carn't be too cautious these days. We got to turn round; Bob; and take that turning we passed

about two miles back. Sorry we can't do nothing about the petrol, sir, but you understand the persish.' He expectorated once more by way of valediction and the lorry having turned round, rumbled off in the direction of Hounslow.

"Damn," cried Trevannagh. "We look like being here all night."

"Mobilizing," said Shannon thoughtfully. "I wonder where that little lot's bound for."

This speculation was cut short by the advent of another car, whose tremendous headlights cut a golden wedge through the darkness. All three yelled at the driver, who began to accelerate and then, thinking better of it, pulled up a few yards past them.

"What d'you want? You've got an extraordinary way of stopping people. Is there anything I can do for you?" he asked, half-timid, half-truculent.

"Petrol," said Trevannagh. "And, by gad, we seem to have come to the right shop." He pointed to the back of the car, which was piled high with petrol-tins. "I must apologize for holding you up in this unceremonious manner, sir, but we're out of petrol, and I should be very grateful if you would sell me a tin."

The stranger seemed relieved.

"Highwaymen never offer payment," he said with a smile. "I beg you to accept a tin." He handed one to Trevannagh and, with a brief good night, left them trying to express their thanks.

"D'you know who that was?" asked Shannon.

"No. Who?"

"Maddison."

"Well, who's he, anyway?"

"His real name is Meierbaum, but he changed it to Maddison about five years ago. He's a big pot in the city, and has a finger in several political pies, too, I'm told."

"Ah, my dear Le Queux, 'tis a German spy. Have you got your dagger loaded?" whispered Trevannagh hoarsely

and brandished a spanner at the retreating tail-lamps.

"I wonder what he wants with all that petrol," said Dick. "Now, if it had been dynamite. . . ."

"He's got enough there to float a battleship," observed Trevannagh, and there the subject was dropped, though as a matter of fact the petrol was used for a purpose exactly opposite to the one suggested by Trevannagh. By way of fuel for a U-boat, it was destined to assist in the destruction of a great cruiser and to send eight hundred men to their death. But that story has been told elsewhere.

August the third was a day of tension. Everywhere one heard different irreconcilable rumours. It was amazing to listen to old women talking European scandal with the same zest that they showed in discussing local tittle-tattle. Old intrigues of the German court were reanimated with a touch of personal and intimate reminiscence, and when memory was exhausted, invention was ever ready to assist. Anecdotes of the Kaiser's boyhood were magnified in order to throw light upon his present conduct, and universal indignation was expressed over his hypocritical behaviour at King Edward's funeral.

On August the fourth, Trevannagh went up to town to try and get a sense of perspective. News by the time that it reached them was in the third generation, and through intermarriage with Rumour and Exaggeration possessed only the faintest resemblance to its grandparent, Truth. Having announced at breakfast that this war business had begun to bore him, Shannon refused to accompany him, and prevailed on Dick to stay behind and play tennis. Having finished their eight set, Shannon was translating to Dick selected portions of a lurid French novel, which he had unearthed in the attic, when Trevannagh burst excitedly into the room.

"This is a fruity little passage, Dick," said Shannon, apparently unaware of his entry, and began to render it into English.

But Trevannagh had by now regained his breath. "I

say ; I've got real news, straight from the stable this time. Oh, chuck that damn book away, Julian"—as Shannon seemed disinclined to abandon his search. "I ran into the gov'nor at the club and he told me. He was awfully decent and never said a word about Betty ; first time I've seen him since the affair, you know."

"Well ?" Dick asked impatiently.

"It's war. We've sent an ultimatum to Germany and we'll be at war to-morrow." He executed a step-dance. "Show some enthusiasm, Julian. Sing 'God save the King' or something. In London, every one's mad. Of course, they don't all know about this ultimatum yet, but they're expecting it. It's great !"

"Most interestin'," drawled Shannon and returned to his book.

Trevannagh went upstairs to wash for dinner, and Dick, after the first excitement had passed, sat wondering just what it would mean to him, to England, to the world.

"What are you going to do about it, Julian ?" he asked at length.

Looking up from his book, Shannon appeared to consider.

"I am going to open our last magnum of champagne," he said.

It was after dinner that Shannon gave his exposition. During the meal he refused to make anything more than a few jocular references to the war, but with the advent of the port, his mood changed. In accordance with his maxim, "Always meet a crisis in your best clothes," they had donned evening-dress and the lamp shone down on white shirtfronts and blackened oak, while the richly-glowing decanters supplied a needed touch of sombre colour.

"I don't quite know how all this business strikes you chaps," began Shannon. "In fact, I'm not quite clear as to what I think myself. But I want to co-ordinate my ideas and get them into their right proportion. The first thing we've got to throw overboard is the conception of this war

as an affair of patriotic songs and flag-waving. It's no use muffling your head in a Union Jack : it obscures the vision. I am trying to lose sight of the war as a personal or even national affair and to regard it as a supreme universal catastrophe. But I can't. I can't lose the English point of view. However much one may set out to be a Humanitarian, as opposed to a patriot, one is bound to orient one's ideas to England." He paused and emptied his glass before continuing.

"I can't grasp the essential reason for this war, nor do I attempt to prophesy the issue. But as regards the personal aspect, I have certain odd theories, which somehow fit in with my conception of ultimate justice." He paused again and Dick kicked Trevannagh under the table.

"If there's anything on your chest, old man," said the latter, "cough it up and—pass the port."

But Shannon needed no encouragement.

"The world has incurred a debt, and it is up to this generation to foot the bill. We've become too artificial, too idle, and this is nature's revenge. Take us three, for example : if you rub away the veneer of good-fellowship and that sort of thing, you come to something useless, something rotten."

"Shame ! Shame !" cried Trevannagh.

"I'm serious. We all love each other dearly, but that doesn't alter the fact that we're pretty futile members of society. What have we ever done that's worth a damn ? If anyone tried to write the story of our lives up to date, could he find one decent action round which to group his tale ? It would be simply dialogue without narrative. We're negative. We have left undone the things we ought to have done and we haven't even done things we ought not to have done. The next best thing to being thoroughly good is being thoroughly bad, but our most ardent admirers couldn't call us either one or t'other. We haven't the strength to stand up and be saved, nor the guts to sin and be damned. Hullo ! That scans." He stopped

abruptly and seemed to be trying to frame a stanza round the phrase.

"I may be dense," said Dick, "but I haven't got there. For some unknown reason, the safety-valve of the European engine has refused to act and this is the result. But to say that my personal shortcomings are responsible for it is—to put it pithily—bilge. This war's too big a thing for personal application."

"I'm only taking us as an example. We're typical of our generation."

"Well, you'd better analyse us, Julian," suggested Trevannagh, winking at Dick. "You're so fond of explaining people."

Shannon looked at him gratefully. "I will, and I'll begin with you, Dickie," he said with the air of an auctioneer's clerk about to make an undervaluation for probate. "You're impersonal and you've got no force of character. You're a social chameleon, taking colour from your company and not from your own personality. Though you mayn't realize it, your conversation is an echo of mine. You've adopted my attitude of mind and expression simply because you're too lazy to be original. You're by no means a fool, but you've got no driving power behind your ability. Brains without character. I love to walk beside you, but I should hate to follow you. We've all three got the same great failing and probably you've got it worse than Duggie or I. Lack of ambition. We've none of us ever stretched for things that we weren't certain of reaching. You're labouring under the disadvantage of inherited wealth. You're cursed with a competence."

"Why cursed?" Dick interrupted.

"Because it's alliterative," retorted Shannon testily. "And because I'm broke myself. Money's been the trouble with all of us. You're sterile, Dickie, because you have had no need to produce. You're too lazy even to make up your mind. You've been drifting about in a pleasant little

backwater with no chance of striking a snag. You've been taking everything and giving nothing. Now is your time to give." Shannon stopped and emptied his glass. Dick laughed uncomfortably, finding too much truth in Shannon's remarks to feel altogether at ease.

"Sentence having been passed, I suppose the prisoner may be allowed to leave the dock," he said. "Now then, Duggie, up you get."

"If he calls you lazy, what the devil is he going to call me?" Trevannagh grinned. "Good after-dinner game, this. Fire away, Julian."

"Most of what I've said about Dick applies to you too. You used to possess the quality of doing things, but you've lost it. Look at your cricket! You've buried your talent under the popping-crease instead of investing it in runs. Probably Dick and I are as much to blame for that as you are. Constant association with us has robbed you of the power of achievement. Then you're too fond of commonplace vices, Duggie—wine and women. You can't say 'no' to a glass or a lass. And unless this war had happened along you'd have been fat before you were thirty."

"Stop! I don't mind anything else, but I do protest against this prophetic obesity."

"There you are," cried Shannon. "Exactly the sort of remark I should have made myself. His master's voice."

"You needn't think you've copyrighted all the cheap wit in the world," said Dick.

"Anyhow, I've had enough," Trevannagh declared. "You have a go at your own shortcomings, and if you happen to forget anything, you can rely on us to remind you."

Shannon refilled his glass and settled down to enjoy himself. They rarely allowed him to talk about his soul, and the chance was not to be missed. For a time he was silent, trying to think of something worthy of the occasion.

"I exemplify the triumph of art over nature," he said at length; "I have become so artificial that it is almost impossible for me to diagnose my own character. I'm a mass of affectation and conceit. I've lost the power of saying what I mean or of meaning what I say. I've neglected to cultivate any virtue save that of being amusing; probably I've only succeeded in making myself intolerable. I don't want people to like me, I want them to admire me. I'd rather be described as a clever young blackguard than not described at all. I haven't the ethical perspective to differentiate between fame and notoriety."

"Steady," Trevannagh interrupted, "you're exceeding your syllable allowance."

But Shannon, having thought of several other good things to say, was not going to be sidetracked.

"I'm not a man, I'm a pose. I can only eat my dinner by pretending to myself that I'm hungry: my appetite or lack of appetite is merely an affectation. I even deceive myself and therefore I can't explain myself. I wear so many disguises one on top of the other that I can't undress myself. I can never see myself naked. Even this confession is a pose and probably I don't believe a word of it."

"You make yourself out a damn sight worse even than us, and I heartily agree with you," said Trevannagh, who was still smarting under the imputation of fatness.

"At least I've done something," replied Shannon. "I set myself to solve a riddle and I've solved it."

"What's he talking about now?" Trevannagh appealed to Dick.

"D'you mean that confounded spiritualism?" asked the latter.

Shannon nodded.

"Oh, that's all dead and buried," said Trevannagh hastily. "Don't let's exhume the body."

Shannon laughed. "I don't want to, in the presence of irreverent people like you."

"If we're all such rotters," Dick speculated, "how the deuce do we ever make friends with anyone?"

"Oh, one chooses one's friends, not for their virtues but for their attractive vices," replied Shannon.

At this moment Mrs. Marripatch entered to clear away.

"There's going to be war, Mrs. Marripatch," Trevannagh declared.

"Um. My Dick'll be in it," she said, and one felt instinctively that the allies had received a powerful reinforcement.

Mrs. Marripatch had apparently no complex explanation of the war, but was quite clear as to the cause and the issue.

"Foreigners I never did like," she announced. "And them Germans is no better than the French nor Eytalians. They're dirty, that's what they are—dirty!" She regarded her clean apron with unction. "That there Kaysar," she said, and made a quaint rasping noise, which ably summarized the allied view as to the correct disposal of the Emperor's person.

When she had left them, a discussion arose as to the best method of joining the army. On this topic they were all rather vague, their main source of information being the posters displayed in the post offices.

"One enlists—takes an oath or something at a Recruiting Office, I think," said Shannon, for once uncertain of his subject.

"I've got a godfather who's a general at the War Office," Trevannagh announced. "He might work it for us."

"Who's he?"

"Lieut.-General Sir Aylmer Pendarvis-Arcot, with most of the alphabet in—er—column of route after his name."

"Reminiscences of my term with the Harrow O.T.C—by a cadet," murmured Shannon.

"If one mentioned a name like that in the War Office they'd make one a colonel straight away," said Dick.

"As far as I can make out"—Shannon recaptured the

initiative—"there are four branches of the army in which one might enlist: the engineers and the artillery, who only think mathematically; the infantry, who are incapable of original thought; and the cavalry, who can't think at all."

"What about flying?" Trevannagh inquired. He had once paid five guineas to loop the loop and still talked with rather an arrogant intimacy about "aileron" and "fusillages."

"My dear fellow, the war would be over before you'd learnt," Dick objected.

A second time Shannon managed to regain his audience.

"If we're going to be in this war at all, we're going to be right in it, and as it's going to be an infantry war—all wars are in the long run—we'd better go into the infantry, unless Duggie prefers the cavalry—for mental reasons." He ducked skilfully, thereby avoiding a handful of walnuts, which exploded harmlessly against the wall. "Moreover I suggest that we don't try to become officers through Duggie's fairy-godfather. Let's be simple Tommies; it'll be much more fun."

"Soldiers three," said Dick. "There's a distinct resemblance in diction between Julian and Otheris."

However, Shannon carried his proposals without opposition and until bed-time maintained his hold upon the conversation. Since his outlook must at all costs be original, he chose to see the war, not as something terrible nor even inconvenient, but strictly from his own point of view, as something rather apt. Here was he, bankrupt, with all sorts of unprepossessing prospects ahead of him . . . and now this war had happened along just in the nick of time. Because every one was prophesying a speedy end, he elected to declare that it would be a long business; and because every one said that it would be tremendous and fundamental, he chose to regard it as a mere incident. To Trevannagh, who, in an effort to scale the same intellectual heights, had mumbled something about worn-out creeds,

he retorted that all creeds were so diaphanous that they were threadbare the first time on. . . . Altogether he was very delightful, amusing and futile.

As they were going to bed, Trevannagh reverted to Shannon's original theme. "Look here, Julian," he said, "you go too fast for me, and I haven't digested half your intellectual feast." He paused, rather pleased with his phrase. "But you said earlier on that this war was going to make us pay for our sins. Well, I reckon that you and I, at all events, have paid. You've been hit in the pocket and I—well, to say the least of it, my reputation is a bit blown on. I think we're entitled to a receipt for all items up to date."

Shannon laughed. "He's been thinking out this idea the whole evening and trying to put it into decent language," he said to Dick. "Though the brain of Dug grinds slowly, yet it grinds exceeding small."

"Well, you two may have paid," said Dick. "But what about me?"

Dropping his bantering tone, Shannon turned, and there was a look on his face that Dick had never seen there before: a look of tenderness, of pity, of inspiration.

"The burden which you will have to bear will be far greater than these," he said gently.

Unable to sleep, Dick told himself that he was excited, yet somehow he did not feel in the least thrilled. He failed to see the war as anything save an infernal nuisance, and though he tried to dismiss it from his thoughts, it somehow managed to dominate them, bringing with it an atmosphere of change, of disquiet. Constantly recurring with ever-increasing fever, Shannon's good-night speech echoed in his brain. "The burden which you will have to bear will be far greater than these." At the moment he had been too surprised to demand an explanation and Julian had been able to make an effective exit. Again and

again he went over the conversation which had preceded the remark, and each time he was brought up short before the gateless wall of the message. What the deuce had he meant? Or perhaps he hadn't meant anything at all. Dick came to the conclusion that this was the real cause of his sleeplessness and determined to go and have it out with Shannon. He remembered that the latter had a very pretty taste in insomnia, which he attributed to an over-active brain, so the chances were in favour of finding him awake. He got as far as Shannon's door before abandoning this idea; satisfied by his deep breathing that he was sound asleep, Dick shrank in his present mood from the scrimmage that was bound to take place if he wakened him.

He returned to his room and then, quite suddenly, drowsiness overtook him. His thoughts turned sleepily to Lois. Next to his friendship with Shannon and Trevannagh, she had been the strongest impulse in his life. He must find her again. There were certain to be opportunities, and it only required tact to reinstate himself with her mother. Besides, this war was going to change everything—profoundly. He thought airily of Babette and of similar lapses. He felt immensely patronizing towards them. They no longer appeared either as a splendid adventure or as something base and unclean, but merely as something purely incidental. He tried to weave them into the pattern of his thoughts, but the pattern became patchwork, vanished.

Dick had always possessed the gift of vivid dreaming. Usually his dreams were extravagant and gorgeous, with the colours that are only to be found in dream pictures, but that night he dreamed in sepia. He was walking along a road which, outlined by poplars, stretched away unswervingly to the limit of his vision. It was night, and the dim grey road emphasized the black dreariness of the surrounding country. Rain was falling steadily and the thick mud clogged his footsteps, but he tramped

doggedly on, because his dream ordained that he should do so and he was powerless to leave the road in search of shelter. He was powerless also to hail the great motor lorries which from time to time rumbled sullenly past him, each with some mission to execute, which, he somehow knew, forbade them to help him. In his dream he connected them vaguely with the lorry which had passed them a few nights before on the Bath road, but the poplars disturbed the connexion and presently all thought of this waking incident faded from his dream-memory. Intolerable loneliness oppressed him and sorrow that lacked the quickening touch of tragedy. He was unable to people the encircling darkness even with terrors: it was void, and nothing solid remained but this interminable road with its mournful, rustling poplars and the dark lorries that rumbled past and made no sign. Behind him the sky was grey with a dawn that would never overtake him, but he was powerless to turn and greet it, powerless to do anything save march steadily on into the darkness, under the burden of irretrievable loss.

Dick came back slowly to consciousness. For a moment it seemed that the dawn of his dream had at length overtaken him and lit his world, for the room was illuminated by a flickering light, which wrought fantastic and elaborate phantoms upon the wall. But this illusion did not obtain for long. A voice struck up "Rule Britannia" and a number of other voices joined in declaring that they never, never would be slaves. A half-hearted attempt at the Marseillaise was followed by God save the King, but, when that was finished, the singers, with a truly British sense of decorum, realized that it would be indecent, even disloyal, to continue. Their only method of self-expression without *lèse-majesté* was a ragged cheer. The bonfire died down and the party, after a few valedictions, mingled with curses at the darkness, dispersed. And that was how the War came to the village.

PART II

HOW THE DEBT WAS PAID



CHAPTER I

AT the end of the first week in August, the three friends came up to London, determined to be in France before the war was a month old. Mrs. Marripatch saw them off with all the pomp and circumstance of a Spartan mother, for, being deprived of the privilege of speeding her own sons, who were already mobilized, to battle, she felt entitled to a thrill of vicarious motherhood at the departure of her former masters. On arrival at Paddington, Shannon discovered a friend.

"See that big chap over there, in the comic hat," he said to the others. "That's old Craddock. Used to write the financial column for one of the dailies, but the rubber-boom went to his head and he rushed off out East to plant things. He looks very martial; might be able to put us on to something good."

Having once run a financial column, Craddock had never lost the habit of giving advice. "What you chaps ought to do," he said, "is to join an irregular gentlemen's corps—well, you know what I mean. I think I can put you on to the very thing." He paused. "The Imperial Planters," he said, with the significant air of a man devising a formula.

"What's that?" asked Shannon, "a sort of Cabal?"

"It will undoubtedly prove to be one of the finest movements of the war," replied Craddock magnificently. "All we planters, who're on leave—including some of the African ones, I believe—are forming just the sort of corps you're

looking for. A chap called Shail is getting it together. Damn smart fellow—doesn't allow the grass to grow under *his* feet" (as though he expected grass to sprout from Paddington platform beneath their boots). I'll give you his address; just say you come from me. It doesn't matter you're not being planters; he'll be very pleased to see you, as, between ourselves, we're anxious to get recruits of a certain class—a certain class, you understand—and although the backbone of the regiment will be composed of pukka planters, there'll be plenty of room for fellows like yourselves. In my opinion, it'll be the best irregular corps. Capital lot of fellows! Of course, I'm joining myself," he concluded, as though that set the seal on the corps' worthiness.

"Awfully decent of you," Trevannagh murmured.

"That's all right. Here's the address and here's one of my cards. Very happy to have been of service." And he marched off in the wake of a porter, who was completely enveloped in a portable tent, a rubber bath and a pith helmet.

"An egregious ass," Shannon remarked. "Still, we might do worse."

"Let's go along straight away," said Dick. "I wish you'd brought your car, Duggie." In the first flush of enthusiasm, Trevannagh had lent it to the local Territorial Association, though, as the others hastened to point out, it was more likely to hinder than to aid their activities. It says something for the courtesy and efficiency of Lord Haldane's creation that they accepted it with thanks—and without inspection.

They found the place without difficulty. A large placard announced: "Imperial Planters M.L.I. Recruiting Office. Enquiries. 4th Floor." This looked imposing, but after attaining the suggested altitude, they found themselves confronted by a small door, bearing the legend: "Don't knock, come in," while under this was painted: "Head-

quarter of the Eugenic Research Society." However, disregarding the latter notice, they entered to find themselves in a small office in the centre of which was seated a young man in shirtsleeves, who was smoking a cigarette, talking into a telephone, scribbling memoranda on a piece of paper and maintaining a heated discussion with the other occupant of the room, a colourless individual, who grunted sardonically and sucked an empty pipe.

"Hullo," cried the gentleman at the table, "you chaps coming to join up? Splendid. No?" To the telephone: "I said two one owe nine, not two nine owe nine. For God's sake realize there's a war on. I expect you chaps want particulars. Hold hard a moment and I'll give you the book of words. Look here, Jamieson," to the other man, "if you don't have a cobra, what the deuce are you going to have? I think a cobra about to strike, with the motto, 'If I strike, I kill.' In Latin, of course. Forgotten my classics, still perhaps . . ." he looked inquiringly at Dick, who blushed. By this time the telephone operator, having decided there was a war in progress, had secured the right number. "Hullo, that you, Jacobs? Yes, Shails speaking. Everything going swimmingly. Yes, pouring in. We're just deciding the regimental badge. I say a cobra." He turned to Jamieson again and threw him a rough sketch which he had been making. "Looks jolly fine. All right," in answer to a derogatory grunt from Jamieson. "If you don't like it you can damn well clear. No, not you, Jacobs, old chap. I'll explain in a moment. D'you know if they have cobras in Africa? I want the thing to be representative. Half a minute, three likely lads have just blown in. (To Shannon) So you know Craddock, great pal of mine, used to be up the K.V. together. Have a tube while I just settle these points." He pushed a box of cigarettes across to them. "You still there, Jacobs? Yes, I hope to be in camp within ten days. As soon as we've got a hundred. What? Yes, about thirty-five, but

they are pouring in, simply pouring in. Just a moment—all right—cheero. I say, Jamieson, you might type a request to the W.O. for leave and authority to wear a cobra as our badge." Another grunt. "Very well, I'll do it myself. Damn lot of good, you are." Once more he addressed the three friends, with the relief of one who turns from business to pleasure. "This," he said, "is one of the finest movements of the war. The idea is that for the present we each pay for our own training, and as soon as the War Office recognizes us, we shall be put on a proper footing, and I expect they'll be only too pleased to send us across the water. I put it at three weeks at the outside. Any questions you chaps would like to ask?"

"Rather difficult to find one's own equipment. I expect the War Office has commandeered all that stuff, hasn't it?" asked Trevannagh.

"Oh, no. Not a bit of it. Trust them—not a bit of it."

"Where is your camp going to be?" asked Dick.

"Ah, that is a point," replied Shail, with the air of a schoolmaster answering a boy who has asked an intelligent question. "I'm in touch with several people. Probably not far from Salisbury Plain, but, of course, I'll let you know. Anything else? I'm pretty busy, as you see." He began jotting down further notes. "Right-o. Give your names in to Jamieson."

The trio retired in good order and went in search of drinks.

"That show's still-born," Shannon declared.

A few hundred yards from Victoria Street another placard arrested their attention. "The Old Boy's Own. For Public School and University Men and all Sportsmen. Wanted 5,000 recruits by Saturday." A further notice informed them that the first thousand had already been passed.

"Let's try this," Dick suggested. "And then we can join whichever gets going first."

Accordingly they lined up in the long queue, which was slowly moving towards a table in a small courtyard. At this table was seated an old gentleman, who was manifestly too old to serve himself, but who was anxious to do his bit, and more than anxious to see the youngsters do theirs. Having got into the queue ahead of the other two, Dick found that the duty of spokesman devolved upon him.

"Could you give me some particulars about this corps, sir?"

The old gentleman inflated his chest. "This, sir," he began, "is one of the finest move——"

"I'm sure of it," cut in Dick. "Have you got official recognition from the War Office?"

"That is only a question of days, perhaps of hours. I was about to remark that this is one of the finest movements——"

"I know you were," said Dick.

The old gentleman eyed him with suspicion. "I doubt if there is any vacancy for you," he said icily.

"Well, that's that," remarked Trevannagh as they emerged. Shannon made no comment, but hailed a taxi.

"Drive us to the Recruiting Office of a regiment that has already got a regimental badge and has received recognition from the War Office."

The driver winked at them. "I've 'ad some, myself," he confided. "You leave it to me. I've just drawn the bob, too."

Three hours later, Dick, Shannon and Trevannagh found themselves full-blown privates in the Royal Middlesex, with an assurance that they would not be called up for another fortnight, but that they were then to report at a certain depot, failing which they would be liable to the utmost rigours of military law.

"This," said Shannon, fingering his shilling, "coupled with my brains and personal appearance, is now my sole asset."

"So help me God," added Trevannagh, reminiscently.

Dick took the other two home to dinner and found his father, mother and uncle already in possession. Although much upset by the war, Mrs. Goodall seemed to derive great comfort from a mathematical problem with a biblical basis. By adding together the number of verses in one of the epistles and dividing the total by the number of chapters in another, she had reached the conclusion that the war could only last four months, a belief strengthened by several passages in Revelation. But for her the war was dwarfed by a more personal and immediate tragedy. It appeared that one of her greatest friends had not only "gone over to Rome," but was actually intending to enter a convent. German spies, she thought, were quite kindly folk compared with Jesuits.

"And all her money will go to—to Rome," she concluded.

"Buying a peerage in heaven by subscribing to party funds," said Uncle Dick.

After the ensuing dispute, in which Uncle Dick maintained his favourite thesis that God owed as much to evolution as man, the declaration of their enlistment fell a trifle flat. Uncle Dick said "Good men," and Mr. Goodall muttered something about "if he were only ten years younger," but on consideration changed it to twenty. Mrs. Goodall, being already in tears, was deprived of her climax.

"Well, don't let's talk about it," said Dick, rather dismayed. "How did you enjoy yourselves at Bourne-mouth?"

"Beastly place, all bath chairs and bacteria," said Uncle Dick.

"I think of going back, or perhaps I shall try Swanage," said Mrs. Goodall.

"A one-horse-place and that's a donkey," retorted Uncle Dick.

“Why go at all?” asked Dick. “Why not stay here?”

“I don’t think London will be safe,” said Mrs. Goodall.

“Why ever not?”

“Bombardment from balloons,” she said tentatively, and then with conviction, “fire from heaven.”

In spite of its unfavourable beginning, dinner was a great success. Uncle Dick, of course, had become a war expert, and the casual intimacy with which he talked about fifteen inch guns was tremendously impressive. Moreover he was one of the few people who really saw the Russians go through, and his description of a huge, bearded Cossack, speaking an uncouth language at a remote railway siding, was encored by every one.

“A colossal fellow,” said Uncle Dick, “all beard and astrakan. He’ll make the boche sit up.” He enlivened the meal with strategical illustration. Having ruined the cloth by drawing a map of Belgium with a fork, he proceeded quite convincingly to surround the pepper pot (Von Klück) with other table impedimenta. “I don’t see how he’s going to get out of that,” he said, with a shake of the head and a vague air of reproof.

Mrs. Goodall insisted that Shannon should stay the night, remarking in a loud aside to her husband that “the poor boy probably wouldn’t have a roof over his head much longer.” She also kissed Trevannagh good night in token of forgiveness for his affair “with that horrible woman.” Not only in Parliament but also domestically, England tried to present an united front to the foe.

After an impatient fortnight, the three friends duly reported themselves and were dispatched along with a hundred other recruits to a camp upon a suburban common, where they learned to form fours and slope arms, when the fifty rifles allotted to the battalion were available for the latter exercise. Apart from a brawl with the orderly corporal the day after their arrival, they managed to behave

themselves in accordance with King's Regulations and the Kiplingian conception of soldiership. Shannon in particular threw himself heart and soul into the business of becoming a complete Tommy ; his language deteriorated and he even talked grandly of walking out with a house-maid.

At the end of the first week the camp was condemned by an inspecting medical officer and the troops were accordingly billeted upon the inhabitants. Dick and his friends found themselves the guests of a retired builder and his wife in whom snobbery and patriotism strove for mastery. Finally she effected a compromise by treating them with kindly patronage, but she never allowed her daughters anything more intimate than a frigid "good-morning." Constantly in Dick's hearing she bewailed the fact that "ordinary soldiers" had been thrust upon her, whereas "that Mrs. Green" (here followed a shake of the head and a pursing of the lips, which hinted that Mrs. Green was no better than she should be) had two lieutenants. This uneven distribution of favours by the powers that be, coupled with Trevannagh's boots, were the good lady's chief grievances. The amount of mud introduced into the house by the latter was prodigious and provoked a series of written orders hung conspicuously in various places. "All boots to be removed in the kitchen." "Slippers must be worn in the house." Thus did militarism and discipline enter into the homes of the people.

Under the stimulus of war hitherto unsuspected talents revealed themselves. Dick discovered that he had a natural gift for sewing on buttons and darning tunics ; Shannon developed a genius for cooking and Trevannagh became a button-polisher of distinction. With their comrades they soon achieved a certain popularity, chiefly owing to Trevannagh's never-failing good-humour, and though at first they were regarded with suspicion as "toffs," they soon paid their footing and were received into the

fraternity. To their landlady it remained the supreme tragedy of the war, that she only found out their social status after they had left.

At the end of a month Dick was granted week-end leave, and decided to go down to Wimbledon to make his peace with Lois. He rang the bell with some trepidation and was ushered into the drawing-room, where, to his surprise, Mrs. Effingham received him very graciously. She had evolved a number of theories and rumours about the war and, having inflicted these *ad nauseam* upon her family, was delighted to find a fresh audience. In return Dick told her about his uncle's encounter with the Russians—a story which she added to her repertoire and which, before he left the house that evening, she retailed as having happened to a very dear friend of her own. After half an hour of this sort of thing, Dick was emboldened to ask if Lois were at home. To this Mrs. Effingham replied that she was expecting her back any minute, and with a newly-born hospitality insisted that he should stay to supper.

When presently the door-bell rang, Mrs. Effingham became quite playful. "That's Lois,"s he said ; " you get behind the door and we'll give her such a shock."

Unfortunately it was not Lois, but an elderly neighbour, who had come to pay an afternoon call and who quite failed to see anything funny in Dick's position. Her visit was passed in trying to explain the matter, but she left patently unconvinced and inclined to believe the whole thing was a conspiracy. This incident served to recall Mrs. Effingham to her ancient hauteur.

" A fool," she said bitterly as the front door closed. There was a pause, and then Mrs. Effingham began asking civil questions about Dick's family as though she were propounding riddles. But the climax was reached when, after another pause, she asked : " And how are your friends, Mr. Shannon and—er—the other ? "

" Quite well, thanks," said Dick, for the sixth time.

Mrs. Effingham considered the matter.

"I am glad of it," she said after some deliberation.

The tension was finally relieved by the return of Lois, who burst unceremoniously into the room.

"Why, Dickie," she said, and blushed deliciously.

Mrs. Effingham, displaying a kindness that was too elephantine to be tactful, declared that she must "just go and knock off a few letters," and left them alone. Dick, reflecting that the war had vastly improved her, did not realize that it was the duty of every good mother to get her daughter's future settled before all the young men had gone over to France.

"Well?" he asked shyly, "I hope you've forgiven me, Lois."

"What for?"

"Oh, I don't know. I thought you were fed up with me. You stopped writing."

"That was because mother found out." And she made a *moue* to express what she had suffered for his sake.

"Anyway, she was very nice to me this afternoon."

"Perhaps she's seen the error of her ways."

Dick found things were not going as he had hoped they would. Moreover Mrs. Effingham, whose correspondence consisted mainly of insulting post cards, might return at any moment. He must make a plunge for it.

"Say you're pleased to see me again, like a nice, well-brought-up girl."

"Of course I'm pleased, Dickie," she said, and smiled alluringly.

"I'm afraid you've forgotten how to express yourself," he declared, and proceeded to demonstrate.

"Ooh," said Lois, and Dick commandeered the sofa.

Half an hour later the door opened and Mr. Effingham entered. "Um," he said, "quite right not to waste electric light in war-time. All right, don't move; see you at supper." A long, comfortable silence followed.

"You haven't changed a bit, Lois," said Dick at length.

"Well, you silly old thing, it's only two months since you've seen me."

"Good Lord," said Dick sententiously. "It seems a lifetime."

The only other remark was a pungent criticism of army administration.

"This khaki is rough, it scratches one's face like anything."

"I feel it's a real tunic now," replied Dick ungallantly, "because it's tasted powder."

Supper was not the success that it should have been. Mrs. Effingham had apparently hardened her heart and maintained a formidable silence, broken occasionally by a dashing and victorious sortie into speech. Mr. Effingham, at no time a great talker, did his best by reciting current prices; for him the war was merely an affair of credits and markets, while a battle lost was not so much a defeat as a fall in the exchange on the sovereign. Dick was not sure enough of his footing to say much, and Lois, after such an emotional afternoon, was too sleepy.

"I wonder you don't try and get a commission," said Mrs. Effingham, helping the company to jam tarts with the precision of a sergeant-major detailing a fatigue party.

"There's young Stevenson," said Mr. Effingham, as one who cites the classic instance.

"I'm very happy in the ranks," Dick maintained.

"I think he'd make a jolly good officer," said Lois. "Don't you, mother?"

"That is one of the matters that we leave to Kitchener," replied Mrs. Effingham coldly.

However, before he left, Mrs. Effingham thawed again and gave him a standing invitation to come whenever he liked.

"Lois will always be pleased to see you," she added, as though indulging an inexplicable whim of her daughter's.

On the following day, a Sunday, the three friends had agreed to meet for dinner at the *Brasserie Latine*. They were due to return the same evening, but they were determined to make the most of their leave and, though their landlady had refused them a latch-key, to trust to the last train and the cook's good-nature. The *Brasserie* seemed fuller than ever, but now at least half the men were in khaki. Many of the Bohemians had sacrificed their art and their hair to their country, and though a few of these familiar Samsons were absent, the Delilahs appeared to have gained many recruits.

Seeing Shannon and Trevannagh in a corner, Dick threaded his way across, eager to tell them of his successful visit. But Shannon forestalled him.

"All right, Dickie," he cried. "We know all about it. She was delighted to see you and mamma was quite gracious. Though you were damned secretive about where you were going, Duggie and I both guessed it in one and your beaming countenance gave us the clue to your reception. Lordy, lordy, this love's-young-dream business makes me feel very old."

By this time Dick had noticed that Trevannagh also seemed to be on the best of terms with himself.

"Yes," continued Shannon, "here's another of 'em. Order the kind gentleman a drink and tell him all about it."

"Well, you know, the mater's turned Poldene into a hospital," said Trevannagh. "She came up to town yesterday to see me, and who should we bump into but Julian and—er—Dolores. Mater took an immense fancy to her and is carting her off to Poldene as a voluntary worker. She'll be there until the war's over. I'm fearfully braced about it."

"It's awfully good of your mother," said Shannon, "because it is as much as the gov'nor can do to feed Dol these days, leave alone dress her."

"Nonsense, jolly sporting of Dol to come and give a hand, because, if the mater runs it, it's sure to be a rotten hospital. Now if I could only get the V.C. and a small wound in the fleshy part of the right arm. . . ."

A Canadian at the next table leaned drunkenly across to him.

"You're far more likely to get hit over the head with a ruddy bottle," he remarked.

Trevannagh beamed at him affectionately, "Really! What makes you think so?"

The Canadian proceeded to supply an excellent reason and a general *mêlée* ensued. Both sides were reinforced, and chairs, tables and crockery fell noisily, but just as the brawl was beginning to look really dangerous, a loud and authoritative voice shouted "Stop!" There was something so commanding about it that the combatants involuntarily separated. Even the Canadian was sobered and regarded his bottle apprehensively, as though he expected the evil genii of the A.P.M. to issue therefrom. Looking round, Dick discovered with relief that the peace-maker was Praed, who, now that the fracas was over, was deftly levering the tables and chairs into their normal position with his feet, at the same time descanting upon the abuse of drink.

"Ye are no true disciples of Bacchus," he concluded with a superb gesture. "Ye are as the man who offered money for spirituous gifts. *Procul, O procul este profani.*"

"Gawd," said the Canadian, mystified by this language. "'E must be a bleedin' ally. All right, cocky. *Vive le France.*" And he sat down again quite amicably.

Praed kicked the broken glass under the sofa and then joined the three friends, who were dusting one another carefully.

"So you've joined up," he said. "I tried to. I tried to three times. But no! My heart isn't all it should be. Tic! Tic!" He held up a warning hand to emphasize

the pause. "Tic. Brandy," he added, thereby explaining the cause of his rejection and ordering a drink.

Dick nodded to the waiter. "That's right. These are on me. Jolly good of you to stop that shindy!"

At this moment they were joined by a seedy-looking man in a sombrero hat, who seated himself at their table without apology.

"Make it five," shouted Praed to the waiter.

The new-comer, without acknowledging this civility, produced a small note-book from his pocket and regarded it gloomily.

"I'm not going to ask you what you think about the war," Praed declared. "I'm going to tell you what you think. You imagine it's a fine adventure. You think it will restore the age of romance. You're wrong. Barbed-wire has killed romance and the war of to-day provides no scenic effects. It is death without dignity."

The seedy stranger looked up. "It's all very well for you young fellows," he said pettishly. "All you've got to do is to go out and get shot. But I'm the one who's really hit by the war. My public will get killed and then where shall I be?"

"Perhaps he won't enlist," said Shannon unkindly.

"You can sneer, if you will. I don't profess to cater for the multitude," he replied, apparently on the brink of tears.

"Never mind," said Shannon consolingly. "It is better to be caviare than haddock."

The stranger brightened. "Good," he said. "Caviare; haddock. Good." And he made an entry in his note-book.

"As for you, Praed," continued Shannon, "you're talking rot. How dare you speak of death without dignity, when better men than you are laying down their lives every day? It's the greatest romance that the world has ever seen."

"You're talking like a recruiting poster," retorted

Praed. "Yes, you—of all people. I'm willing to go and die for my country, if it would have me, but I don't imagine that there would be anything romantic about it. A crude, ugly picture it 'ud make, one of your pretty, pretty Millais effects. Bah! I thought you'd got some sense."

"Oh, cut it out," said Trevannagh, "I've thought of a really sound excuse for a few drinks. We'll each propose the health of one of the allies, and the one who gets stumped for it first, pays for the lot. Got the idea? I've no notion how many there are, but I'll break. Hi, waiter."

They all rose solemnly, if unsteadily, to their feet.

"England," said Trevannagh.

It was just after the second round had started, that Dick, by nominating Montenegro, exhausted the stock of allies, but the stranger rose to the occasion.

"Mexico," he said firmly.

"Mexico isn't an ally," Dick objected. "They're on you."

"How d'you know Mexico isn't an ally?" he retorted. "I've every reason to believe that they've declared war on Germany—every reason. Only these things don't get into the papers. If you will excuse me a moment, I will go and ring up the Foreign Office to verify my statement. Don't do anything about paying for the drinks until I come back." And he marched out with all the honours of war.

"Who the deuce was that?" asked Dick, when they had recovered from their stupefaction.

"He?" said Praed. "Oh, he's the inventor of post-impressionist poetry."

"Excuse my Victorianism," said Dick, humbly. "But what is post-impressionist poetry?"

"You've seen a post-impressionist picture?" Dick nodded and Praed warmed to his task. "In a post-impressionist picture, as you know, the subject is split up into its component parts, each part being represented

without reference to the other parts. Thus in a portrait of a woman, one may legitimately put an eye in one corner of the canvas and an eyebrow in the other. Now in post-impressionist poetry, of which, as I said, our friend is the inventor, this method of expression is logically transferred from paint to print. Just as an artist splits up a face into its component features, so the poet splits up words into their component syllables. Very original, you must allow, though I doubt if it will ever become really popular."

"It must be absolutely unintelligible," said Dick.

"But of course," replied Praed in surprise, "that is its main charm. One does not understand Art any more than one understands God. One simply admires.

"And so we must venerate, what we are not able presently to comprehend," quoted Shannon. "God, Art and the British Constitution."

The talk eddied round art and the war, and Praed was moved to declare that the latter would give no stimulus to the former. "Masefield has forestalled the war-poet," he said, "and a modern battlefield gives no chance to an Ucello. Perhaps it may be depicted by a modified form of futurism."

"What d'you mean by futurism?" asked Trevannagh.

"Futurism," explained Praed, with a wave of the hand, "is an onomatopœia in colour."

Dick noticed that Shannon listened impatiently. He seemed to be profoundly irritated, and when Praed, having rightly decided that no more free drinks were forthcoming, had left, he broke out angrily.

"Thank God, that waster's gone. He makes me feel damn well sick. Prides himself on his mental detachment from the war, as though any man, worth his salt, would turn his mind to anything else. I know what you're thinking, Dick. A few weeks ago, I suppose I was on the way to becoming a second Praed. Of course I can't

altogether change, but I'd like to be a real man before I die."

"Who's talking about dying?" asked Dick.

Shannon smiled whimsically. "I apologize. That remark was in the worst possible taste. Anyway, let's eat, drink and be merry, for to-morrow we drill."

He certainly succeeded in being merry, and getting him back to camp became a matter of some difficulty. It was the fountain in Piccadilly Circus that was the cause of the whole trouble. For some time he stood regarding it with increasing exasperation, and all efforts to move him were in vain.

"I'm not going, until I see tha' feller return to the loading position," he declared. "Stan' at 'eese."

"Get a taxi, Dick, for heaven's sake," said Trevannagh. A crowd was beginning to collect and the military police might arrive at any moment.

"Wha's tha' about a taxi?" cried Shannon. "Stop that laughing in the ranks"—as a titter went up from the crowd.

At this moment a large touring-car stopped in front of them and an officer jumped out.

"What the deuce is all this about?" he demanded sternly.

Dick, standing rigidly at attention, was quite incapable of evolving a plausible excuse, for whenever the trio got into difficulties, the necessary explanations were always left to Shannon.

"Well," demanded the officer, and then, "Bless my soul, if it isn't young Goodall!"

Dick inspected him with a new hope. "It's old Henners," he declared ecstatically and then, remembering his rank, saluted.

"A pleasant sort o' fellow," remarked Shannon to the world at large. "But no brains. Strong in the arm, weak in the head."

"Get that ass into the back of the car," said Hennessey. "You'd better all come along with me, before there's trouble. I'm staying at a pub. down Covent Garden way, and I'd like to have a yarn with you men."

Protesting loudly, Shannon was lifted into the motor, but after having sentenced the statue to seven days' C.B. for "insubordination," he became calmer and soon fell fast asleep.

"I'll fix him all right, as soon as we get there," Hennessey prophesied. "Cold water and an emetic."

A few minutes later they reached his hotel, and, having helped Shannon upstairs, proceeded to put this prescription into practice. Partially sobered, Shannon began to apologize, but Hennessey cut him short.

"Never mind about that, now. I expect you chaps have got to go back to camp, so let's get to business. We'll have plenty of time to talk about old times, later on. Now, look here! Why don't you men take commissions? You think you're doing a damn fine thing by serving in the ranks, but you're really shirking your duty. You're the type we want as officers: as you are, you're simply a waste of good material. Now, my C.O.—I'm adjutant of the 18th —shires—sent me up to town to try and get some subalterns out of the War Office. They simply told me to find some likely men, get the C.O. to sign their papers, and they'd make 'em officers fast enough. Well, as soon as I recognized you chaps, I thought, 'Here's the goods!' Is it a deal?"

"We're awfully happy in the ranks," Dick objected. "You'll be happier in the mess."

Shannon roused himself. "Look here, Henners, I'll drive a bargain with you. If you run us back to billets to-night, you can make us all into Field-Marshal."

"Right-o! I suppose you others agree."

Shannon came to attention with some difficulty.

"I am in charge of this party, sir."

"Are you, young Shan? Acting unpaid lance-corporal or something?"

Shannon rejected this dignity with scorn. "Ce'renly not. I'm a blank file," he said, and relapsed into stupor.

During the drive back Hennessey told Dick of his disappointments and hopes. He had held a commission in the regular army for a couple of years, and on the outbreak of war he had gone with his regiment to France. Wounded on the third day of the battle of Mons, he had been invalided home and, in spite of tears and a total recovery, had been posted as adjutant to one of Kitchener's battalions, with no prospect of rejoining his own unit.

"Still, it's interesting work," he concluded, "and with you chaps there, I expect I'll soon settle down, though I'd give my hat to be back with the boys."

"Any chance of this crowd going out soon?"

"We live in hopes. The men are a good lot and shape pretty well. By the way, does young Shan often get like this?"

"Oh, no. This only happens once in six months. Wake up, Julian! You look more like Praed than ever, when you're asleep."

This remark appeared to sober Shannon more effectually than Hennessey's treatment had done.

"Don't you worry, Dickie," he said quietly. "I'll be a real man, before I die."

Three weeks after their meeting with Hennessey, they received a notification from the War Office that they had been gazetted as second-lieutenants to the 18th — shires and were to report for duty forthwith. By the same post came a letter from Hennessey, granting them four days' leave in order to procure their uniforms and equipment and containing a few hints on what to get and where to get it. Their Colonel had also been advised of their promotion, and quite an affecting scene took place in the orderly-

room. As he had never seen them before, his regret at losing them was the more altruistic.

"I'm sorry you're going," he said. "You're good men, all three of you. Perhaps you think I don't know much about you. (They did—quite rightly.) But a C.O. who's worthy of the name knows every man in his battalion: his failings, his private history, everything. You've all got clean sheets—keep them clean in the new position into which it has pleased the—er—the War Office to call you. Good luck to you."

Saying good-bye to their comrades was a more genuine matter. They felt that they had somehow taken a mean advantage of them and that their departure needed apology rather than congratulation. A round of beer in the canteen invested the occasion with a solemnity almost epic, and when their section-commander, an erstwhile butcher, who had been chosen for this post on account of his familiarity with blood, rose to say a few words, Dick felt ready to howl. "Auld lang syne" and "For they are jolly good fellows" were then sung and, after much vigorous hand-shaking, they drove away amid loud cheers.

"Enough surplus sentiment to endow a feuilleton," said Dick, trying to conceal his emotion, and looking round at Shannon for applause. To his surprise he saw that he was really moved.

"I almost wish we hadn't accepted Henners' invitation," he said. "A capital lot of fellows. If I'd been sober that night, I don't believe I'd have done it."

Dick had kept the matter of his commission a secret both from Lois and from his mother, who, fearing a naval bombardment, had returned from Bournemouth. Merely telling the latter that he had been granted a few days' leave, he surreptitiously ordered his uniforms and then arranged to meet her outside his tailor's. This surprise, though well organized, did not meet with success. In the first place, as he emerged in all the glory of a second-

lieutenant's uniform, he ran into another subaltern, and habit proving too strong, saluted him, much to the other's astonishment. In the second place, his mother quite failed to play her part of the proud parent. It was some time before he could get her to understand that he was now an officer and then she seemed to be a little disappointed that he was only a second-lieutenant and not a colonel like "my Uncle Alfred." Realizing that further explanation was useless, Dick abandoned the topic. Lois, he was certain, would prove more satisfying.

Conscious of impending triumph, he went to call on the Effinghams the following afternoon, having spent the morning in toning down the newness of his Sam Browne. The maid who opened the door was his first victim. For a moment she stared at him open-mouthed.

"Why! It's Mr. Goodall," she said.

"It is, Annie," replied Dick, enjoying himself vastly.

"Well, now." And she inspected him with evident admiration. Leading the way upstairs, she flung open the door of the drawing-room and announced, "Captain Goodall," thereby rather spoiling Dick's entry. In those days the kitchen took cognizance of no rank below that of captain.

"Dickie, why didn't you tell us?" cried Lois. "You look a perfect dream, doesn't he, mother?"

"It's wonderful what a difference clothes make," said Mrs. Effingham.

"That's just what you would say, mother. Anyway, I think you look perfectly sweet."

"Really, Lois," said Mrs. Effingham. "Still, I quite approve of the change. Everybody is taking commissions nowadays. I hear from my fishmonger, that his brother has been promoted to be an officer for bravery in the field."

"Stout fellow," said Dick.

Mrs. Effingham shrugged her shoulders. "I call it intolerable."

Dick checked a hasty retort and Lois tactfully diverted the conversation.

"That reminds me," she said, "do tell Dick what the fishmonger's brother told him about the naval battle in the North Sea."

Mrs. Effingham brightened and at once launched into a description of how the British fleet, after sustaining serious losses, had sunk the entire German navy.

"Eight of our battleships sunk," she concluded with relish, "and sixteen of those little boats—dreadnoughts, do they call them? No, that's not right, but I know it begins with a 'D.'"

"There's nothing about it in the papers," objected Dick.

Mrs. Effingham smiled significantly. "Perhaps I oughtn't to have told you—yet."

A few minutes later, Mr. Effingham, having returned from the city, joined them. He appeared depressed, but cheered up after proving to Dick, that, with the present purchasing value of the sovereign, he could not possibly live on his pay.

"Of course you've heard about the naval disaster off Finistere," he said, when he had exhausted the other topic. "Ten of our ships down and only three Huns. Just off a neutral country, too; we shan't get twenty pesetas for the pound after this. Of course it may turn out to be false," he added dubiously.

"If it turns out to be true," declared Mrs. Effingham grimly, "I shall change my fishmonger."

Unable to get Lois alone, Dick took his leave early, contenting himself with the promise of two letters weekly and a pair of hand-knitted socks. At the same time he registered a vow to propose to her before he went overseas, and much heartened by this decision, went home to study "Infantry Training."

The following day the three friends joined their battalion, which was stationed near Nottingham, and were presented by Hennessey to their brother-officers. With few exceptions they found them an excellent lot of fellows, but unfortunately these exceptions were important. To begin with there was the Colonel. In praising the battalion, Hennessey had wisely refrained from mentioning the C.O. and his reticence was fully justified. Colonel Ellersworthy was an old regular of the worst type—a type which was becoming extinct before the war and whose final disappearance is one of the few benefits that the war has conferred upon us. Stupid, arrogant, dictatorial, he held that the old army possessed a monopoly of manners and breeding and could not understand how anyone of decent birth could embrace another profession. He prefaced most of his remarks with “Damme, sir,” and one knew instinctively that he spelt it with two “m’s” and an “e.” To Trevannagh, on account of his father’s title, he was disposed to be civil and he was at first inclined to give Dick the benefit of the doubt, but Shannon he could not stand at any price.

“Damme, sir, the son of a blasted inkslinger; we don’t want that sort of fellow in the army,” was a remark overheard and treasured by Shannon.

Though of a totally different type, the second-in-command, Major Connaway, was scarcely less objectionable. A schoolmaster by profession, he managed to keep on good terms with the Colonel by shameless toadying.

“We poor thinkers,” he would say, “are of very little account nowadays beside you men of action.”

“Damme, sir,” the Colonel would roar, “I’m a man, not a brain.” And this retort, being his one excursion into epigram, pleased him mightily.

The major’s hobby was applied mathematics, and he had succeeded in reducing infantry drill to algebraic formulæ, though the results of using them were novel

and startling. His former profession induced him to treat the subalterns as monitors and the rank and file as small boys, a habit which made him as unpopular outside the mess as he was in it.

Hennessey's good nature and willingness to help atoned largely for these drawbacks, and he earned their gratitude by getting them all posted to the same company.

"I wish I could chuck this blessed adjutant's job," he said. "Have a company and get you three fellows as my subalterns. I've suggested it, but the old man won't hear of it, and though I says it as shouldn't, God knows what 'ud happen to the battalion if the C.O. hadn't got me to look after them."

Their company commander was a pompous little lawyer, who managed successfully to bring the atmosphere of the High Court into the orderly room and therewith to terrify any culprit so unfortunate as to be brought before him. He always dealt in maximum sentences, and to hear him award fourteen days' C.B. was quite as impressive as to listen to the pronouncement of a capital sentence. Having written several legal textbooks, he felt entitled to all the glamour of authorship, and any reference to "your helpful little treatise on easements, sir," was a certain passport to his favour. Behind his pomposity he was a kindly soul, absolutely devoted to the welfare of his men and extraordinarily popular with them.

It did not take Shannon long to run foul of the Colonel, and a few evenings after their arrival there was a spirited little scene in the mess, in which the Colonel's reiteration of the word "puppy" became monotonous.

"I suppose he'll get me pushed out of this little lot," said Shannon, afterwards, to Hennessey.

"Bless my soul, no! He daren't send in an adverse report on any officer; he got six subalterns sacked just before you came and he's a marked man at the War Office."

"So that's why there was room for us! You're an artful old devil, Hennessey."

Hennessey chuckled. "There's only one way to get rid of him. We must get him promoted."

And indeed a few weeks later a vacancy occurred for a Brigadier-General in the Intelligence Department at the War Office and, by dint of strenuous wire-pulling, Colonel Ellersworthy was promoted to fill this important post. Trevannagh, who, through his godfather's influence, had been a prime mover in this intrigue, felt a little guilty in helping to foist this monument of incompetence upon an already overburdened nation, but Hennessey banished these scruples.

"The old man is quite as capable as at least sixty per cent of the people at the W.O. and, besides, he can't do very much harm there. It's the national asylum for that type of fool. He'll only make the lives of a few clerks miserable, instead of losing the entire battalion in France. It's the best day's work we've done for a long time."

Colonel Ellersworthy himself was delighted. "They can't get on without the old school," he declared. "Damme, sir, these new-fangled notions of the young men are losing the war. Discipline and common sense! That's what they want. Efficiency. Eh! Connaway?"

"Quite so, sir."

"Of course this blasted battalion will go to hell—especially if they promote you, Connaway. Ha! Ha! Damn good that. What!"

The major smiled feebly and served up his usual conversational lob for the Colonel to smash.

"Of course, sir, a poor thinker can ill replace a man of action. . . ."

"Damme, sir, I'm a man, not a brain," roared the Colonel for the last time and, with a valedictory scowl at the mess, who had in duty bound assembled to see him

off, got into his car and disappeared amid a general sigh of relief.

Major Connoway did not achieve his ambition. The War Office saw fit to appoint a new colonel, a young man, who possessed both ideas and courtesy. Under his command the mess became habitable and the battalion was transformed from a discontented mob to an extremely efficient unit. Quite soon after his arrival, he had an important interview with the major, which somewhat took the wind out of that gentleman's sails, and thereafter the poor thinker, from being actively objectionable, lapsed into a boring nonentity.

The three friends soon settled down to their new job. Habitually nervous, Dick did not develop into the perfect platoon commander, but his three months in the ranks had given him some sort of insight into the mentality of his men and he managed to discharge his duties without discredit. To Trevannagh, on the other hand, all these matters came naturally. He was the idol of his men, who nicknamed him "the Baron" and became, under his ægis, the smartest platoon in the regiment. Shannon, who, on account of his olive complexion, was at once christened "the Dago," was at first detested, but after a battalion concert, at which he drew lightning caricatures, sang coster-songs and gave a clog-dance, he was tolerated as "a clever sort of cove," and even became mildly popular, though he was always regarded by the men as an acquired taste.

The economies which his new poverty forced him to practise were a source both of amusement and embarrassment to his friends. Gone were the rich opium-tainted cigarettes of his Oxford days to be replaced by a fictitious and rather pathetic devotion to "woodbines." Dick and Trevannagh did their best to remedy this. Through the medium of one of Douglas's remote cousins, they adopted Shannon as their "lonely soldier," and cigarettes, socks

and other suitable gifts began to arrive in abundance. The imposture was only discovered through Trevannagh's attempt to execute a masterstroke. Having secured a photo of a chorus girl, he made the cousin in question, a deplorably plain but tractable spinster, sign it "Always your loving Poppy" and enclose it to Shannon along with the usual parcel of comforts. Unfortunately Shannon recognized the photograph as one of Trevannagh's earlier indiscretions, showed it to him, and, the latter's power of dissimulation being unequal to the task, the whole plot was discovered.

"Awfully good of you fellows," he said. "But for God's sake don't do this sort of thing again. It hurts a bit, you know. Besides, though I smoked 'em thankfully, those cigarettes are part of another life—the artificial life. A woodbine may be brutal, but it is at least sincere."

Unable after this to assist him, they watched his extravagant habits drop from him one by one. The last to leave him was his passion for rare books, but seven-and-sixpence a day does not offer a fair profit to even the most ignorant of second-hand booksellers, and first editions were forced to give way to sixpenny reprints.

But, if to Shannon the path of economy was a rough one, to Dick and Trevannagh, at any rate, life seemed very good. Lois's letters, though ungrammatical, were frequent and described the fatigue of flag'days and her spasmodic effort at V.A.D. work; and though the socks, when they arrived, could not be seriously regarded as an article of apparel, the labour clearly involved in their manufacture was for Dick a genuine pledge of affection. Trevannagh's love-making, like his character, was sure, if unemotional. The war and her father's poverty seemed to have sobered Dolores, or perhaps she had decided that he deserved something better than mere coquetry. At all events, she wrote to him regularly, and, as half Lady Kin-

thorpe's letters consisted of her praises, he was in no danger of forgetting her.

One morning, Dick and Trevannagh having both received letters from their respective idols, were deep in their correspondence, when Shannon, who in self-defence was reading *The Times*, looked up.

"D'you remember that fellow Rogers?" he asked.

"What, that little 'tic in our year?" Dick inquired.

"Yes," replied Shannon sombrely, "he's been killed in action."

And that one line of print brought the war home to them more forcibly than all the rhetoric of patriotic speeches and the vivid description of "Eye-witness."

Like thousands of others, they were intensely eager to get out and chafed impatiently at the delay. Twice were they sent on overseas leave, only to discover on reporting back to the battalion that the orders were cancelled and that they were to remain for the present at Nottingham. And, so, hinting darkly at German influence in the War Office, they would settle down again to the weary task of waiting in the queue for Armageddon.

At last, when they had almost reconciled themselves to garrison duty for the rest of their lives, definite news arrived. Hennessey made the announcement to the mess just before dinner. "We're off," he said laconically.

The mess was disposed to be sceptical. "We've been caught that way before . . . that joke's got whiskers on it now . . . this is for the third time of asking, if any of you know any jaws or eust impediment. . . ."

"I tell you it's true this time," said Hennessey. "The old man wouldn't let me give it out, until he'd been up to the War Office to make certain. There's no doubt this time."

His words carried conviction. For a moment there was dead silence and then the mess went mad. Major Connaway ordered drinks all round, an unprecedented

occurrence ; O.C. D Company executed a step-dance on a table and Shannon split a bottle of champagne with his dearest enemy.

“ Overseas leave, I take it, Henners ? ” asked some one.

“ Rather.”

“ A grand farewell dinner at the Ritz, I think,” said Trevannagh pensively.

“ Devilish dull, Massini’s for mine,” remarked Shannon’s *vis-à-vis*, who divided restaurants into those in which you can throw bread about and those in which you can’t and who owed some of his most cherished friendships to a well-aimed roll.

Owing to the complaisance of the little lawyer, who found it easier to run a company than a home and therefore took no leave, the three friends were able to get away at the same time. After the first air-raid, Mrs. Goodall had shut up her town house and retired to Guildford, and thither for his leave went Dick, determined that his conduct towards her should give neither of them cause for reproach. And, indeed, his nearness to the great ordeal and his long absence from home had profoundly changed his feelings, which reflected a love that was neither the reliant idolatry of his childhood nor the contemptuous affection of the last few years, but something less critical, more genuine. Knowing that he was everything to her, he realized how far greater was her burden. He had only to fight, while she had to await the result of a stake played in the darkness. His was the glory ; hers the sorrow.

It was not to be expected that Mrs. Goodall would display much fortitude. Here was no Spartan mother. At one time she would weep over him as one who had for all practical purposes already fallen, at another she would proffer advice on how to minimize risks in modern warfare, and through both phases Dick bore with her patiently.

For the last evening of their leave, Trevannagh had arranged a grand farewell dinner. To this meal were

invited Shannon, Dolores, Dick, Lois and a Miss Sheila Teignton, who, in Douglas's opinion, would make a suitable *partie* for Shannon.

"A good little soul," he confided to Dick, who, with Lois, was the first to arrive. "Quite pretty, with a bank balance large enough to make even Cox's civil and more-over a good listener. Just the girl for Julian."

He hustled off to discuss things with the head waiter and, while he was gone, Shannon entered to find Dick for the moment alone.

"I say, old chap," he said. "Before we journey in the vehicle of the *vin du pays* to the *pays du vin*, I want to talk to you seriously for a second."

"Say on, laddie. But be quick, for I shan't be sober much longer."

"You're going back home before rejoining the regiment?"

"Of course."

"Then I want you to take charge of this." Shannon produced an envelope and handed it to him. On the outside of it was written: "To be opened in the event of my death."

"Damn it all, Julian," Dick protested irritably. "You're not going to start that confounded stunt again to-night of all nights."

"Bless you no," replied Shannon gaily. "I only want you to keep this and not to open it until—unless a certain contingency arises."

"All right," said Dick shortly and crammed the letter into his pocket. A moment later the rest of the party arrived and, having been numbered off by Trevannagh, they went into dinner. The evening was perhaps the most hilarious that they had ever spent. As if to atone for his one moment of seriousness, Shannon was in his maddest vein. He flirted outrageously, not only with Sheila Teignton, but also with Lois, and it is doubtful whether even his own sister would have been immune, had not Trevannagh

completely monopolized her. Though there was something hectic about his gaiety, the others played up loyally.

"Fair women and brave men," mumbled Trevannagh vaguely, raising his glass.

"Am I really fair?" demanded Dolores artlessly. "Fair women are quite out of fashion."

"And I'm quite certain we aren't brave," said Dick.

"Courage, like beauty, is of all ages and of all nations," Shannon declared airily.

"Talking of pluck. I heard a queer yarn the other day," said Trevannagh. "Some feller out in France did a bolt and was court-martialled for cowardice. In the course of the proceedings it was discovered that the day before he had done something awfully plucky and had been recommended for a decoration. Of course, they allowed the two things to cancel out."

"Oh, I can't swallow that," Shannon objected.

"Why on earth not? It's quite a possible thing to have happened."

"It's the sequel that I can't believe. I can understand the other part. But the British army hasn't got the sense to cry quits on the two transactions. What they really did was to shoot the man for cowardice and then award him a posthumous V.C."

"If he didn't happen to be your brother, I should say he was an ass," said Trevannagh tenderly to Dolores.

"Look here, you two, behave," cried Shannon. "And you, Duggie, be careful. You know, it's Dol's ambition to capture something young out of *Debrett*. So don't propose to her, or she may accept you."

"She has," said Trevannagh, and pandemonium ensued. Healths were drunk, speeches made, and Shannon ordered a spare place to be laid, so that the A.P.M. should not feel *de trop* upon his arrival.

When the party finally broke up, Dick, upon whom the

duty of taking Lois home naturally devolved, felt that the hour had come for him to redeem his vow.

"Wonderful thing, force of example," he said airily as their taxi coughed its way decorously down the Fulham Road. "I can't possibly let Duggie get married by himself."

"But I don't think Miss Teignton likes you," Lois objected.

"Idiot," said Dick politely.

Lois pouted.

"You know I'm going to France in a day or two," he continued. "God knows if I'll ever come back, but I'd—er—like to know, when I'm out there, that you were waiting for me, old girl. You will, won't you?" Mentally he thanked heaven that Shannon could not hear him; it smacked too much of Lyceum drama. Was it possible, he wondered, to propose to a girl, without any display of sentiment?

"Um," said Lois sleepily.

"Don't say 'um'; say 'yes' or 'no.' " Dick felt outraged.

"Well, yes, then. But what ages you've been getting to the point."

"Really, Lois, you're becoming immodest."

"Well, you've nearly done it, and you really ought to have done it, thirty times in the last year."

"That's a very insubordinate way to speak to your future husband."

"D'you really want me very much, Dickie," asked Lois, changing front.

It was not until they were ascending Putney Hill that another remark was made. "You've got a right to kiss me whenever you want to, now."

"I don't know that I do want," retorted Dick and gave the lie to his words.

As they entered Wimbledon, sudden qualms assailed

him ; certain necessary interviews loomed up, menacing, terrifying.

“ I say, what d’you think your mother’ll say ? ” he inquired apprehensively.

“ I don’t think it’ll be exactly a shock to her,” replied Lois sagely.

“ Anyway, I shan’t see her before I go.” He reflected that even France had its compensations. “ Not that I don’t want to see her, you know, but I hate all these good wishes and that sort of fuss.”

However, he was not to escape even that night without receiving one word of congratulation. After a lengthy farewell he left Lois at her home, and, preferring to walk to the station, turned to dismiss the taxi-driver with a tip commensurate with the greatness of the occasion. The man looked down at him benevolently from his seat and his sixty years.

“ An’ very nice too,” he said, winking solemnly.

CHAPTER II

STRETCHED on a bunk of rabbit wire, Dick looked up at the roof of the dugout with growing annoyance. Outside, the German guns were maintaining an intermittent bombardment and each time a shell dropped anywhere near by, dry earth trickled through the match-boarded roof to fall with unerring aim on his face. He cursed and changed ends for the third time. On a similar bunk immediately below him lay Trevannagh, fast asleep and drowning all but the loudest reports with his snores. In the further corner, two batmen, kneeling round a smoky stove, were trying to induce a mess-tin of tea to boil; the general effect being that of a representation of Macbeth by the Stage Society.

Ten months of France had changed Dick profoundly. The fine initial sense of adventure had soon passed, and though he could not endorse Shannon's judgment that war was not horrible but merely uncomfortable, he found that his mind fluctuated between fear and boredom. The first dead man is a milestone in the progress of a soldier. His baptism of fire had been some mild shelling on the way up the line. With professional detachment, Dick had counted the seconds between the rounds and had felt a thrill of pleasure at getting his men under cover without casualties. And then, as he led the way along the communication-trench, he had come upon it: a queer, inert, white-faced figure, with bloodless lips and stiff, useless limbs. He found it undignified, even grotesque, and wholly pitiful.

For a moment he had looked at it, genuinely interested—it seemed too impersonal to be tragic—and then fear and distaste had seized him. His sergeant, bustling up, had rummaged in the dead man's clothing to see if the identity-disc had been removed, and Dick, unwilling to display any callow emotion before the men, had moved on without comment. A voice had muttered "Another poor — gone West." And that was the dead man's epitaph.

Since then many things had happened and, though he had never had the courage to analyse his feelings, that unknown corpse in the communication-trench remained in his mind as the symbol of new values, the materialization of a nightmare. With death as a commonplace, the old creed of the sanctity of human life and of veneration for the dead disappeared and inevitably his whole mental outlook changed.

Dick gave up the idea of trying to sleep and began to take a desultory interest in the batmen's preparations for tea. The battalion was to be relieved that night to go back for a long rest, and the magic word "leave" had leavened the blasphemy of the last few days. In effect, Shannon and Trevannagh had their warrants actually in their pockets, while Dick himself was to follow a couple of days later. Taking it all round, he came to the conclusion that it wasn't such a bad old war.

There was the sound of hastily-descending footsteps, the noise of a fall, followed by a loud explosion, which shook the whole place and sent a cascade of earth down Dick's neck. Then two figures shot head first into the dugout.

"Noises off; enter hero from the Owe-Pip side," said Dick, when he had satisfied himself that no damage had been done.

Shannon rose from the floor and rubbed his skin delicately.

"This war's getting positively dangerous," he declared,

“ they damn near had me that time—an’ me, with a Blighty ticket in me pocket an’ all. You all right, Colston ? ” He turned to his companion, a gunner, who had come round ostensibly to ask the infantry for targets but really with ulterior designs on their whisky.

The other grunted. “ Me and me mate, sir, was walking along quite peacefully-like, sir,” he said, imitating the “statement” of an old offender, “when all of a sudden, them —— ’uns—begging your pardon, sir—lets drive at us. We wasn’t doin’ nothin’, sir.”

“ Fritz is really going a bit too far this time,” said Dick in a shocked voice. “ He’s wakened the O.C.”

Trevannagh, who had attained to this dignity, after both the little lawyer and his successor had been sent home wounded, sat up and rubbed his eyes.

“ What’s all the noise about ? ” he inquired sleepily.

“ Evening hate,” replied Shannon. “ They’ve pooped off over thirty rounds and their usual allotment’s only forty, so it’s nearly over.”

“ Well, I’d better go and show myself to the troops and reinspire them with confidence,” said Trevannagh, striking an attitude. “ Where’s my tin hat ? ” This article, together with his gas-helmet, were as elusive as the straw hat of Harrow days. “ Ring up your eighteen-inch or eighteen-pounders or whatever it is you’re in charge of, Coles,” he continued to the gunner. “ And ask them to remonstrate with the gentlemen opposite.”

“ Right-o.”

“ Come on, Dick : let’s go and see what it’s all about. You can stay and exchange badinage with the Brigadier over the phone, Julian.”

The dugout in which company headquarters were situated was in a communication-trench. Picking their way along it, with the delicacy of Agag, Dick and Trevannagh reached the fire-trench, where it was at once

manifest to them that this was not the customary evening "strafe."

"Wire-cuttin'," said a sergeant, with an air of successful diagnosis. "Mixing 'em up, of course, sir: but that's what they're after; wire-cuttin'."

The German fire seemed to be concentrated on three different sections of the line and, from the frequency of the rounds, it was obvious that more than one battery was engaged.

"Damn it, they might have waited until we were relieved," grumbled Trevannagh. "Yet they can't be going to make a pukka attack."

"That's a five-nine," said Dick, as a shell of a heavier calibre fell near by, sending up a spout of earth and tangled wire. Though the parapet was some feet above his head, he ducked involuntarily: he had never grown accustomed to shelling and ten months of France had failed to cure him of this habit. As he spoke, the British guns opened out and for several minutes the din was terrific. In those days, counter-battery work had not reached its final efficiency and, instead of shelling one another, the gunners on either side seemed to have determined that the opposing infantry was their sole proper target. As the light began to fail the German fire slackened, but the British batteries, with a kind of feminine instinct for the last word, continued a desultory bombardment. Then, probably owing to the arrival of tea, the shelling ceased.

"I don't like it," Trevannagh declared, when he and Dick were back in the dugout. "They wouldn't waste all that stuff on a quiet sector like this unless they were up to some stunt or other."

"It's only their fun," said Shannon. "After all, what's the use of having a cannon, if you don't let it off sometimes?"

But Trevannagh was not listening.

"I think I've rumbled their little game," he announced.

"They're bound to know our system of reliefs and so they think they'll make a nice little raid, while we're saying 'How-de-do' to the Fusiliers. Crowded trenches, certain amount of confusion, bombs and iron crosses all round. See Berlin Official."

Though in his heart Dick knew Trevannagh was right, he tried to argue himself out of this conviction. Raids left Shannon unmoved, while Trevannagh greeted them with positive glee, but to Dick's highly strung temperament they were a motif of terror in the general theme of discomfort.

"I think it was only an ordinary 'strafe,'" he suggested.

"Anyway, we can't afford to take any risks."

"Well, you know the old company aphorism," remarked Shannon—

"When in doubt, my son,
Send a strong patrol,
With a Lewis gun,
To Heinrich's Hole."

"Ass," laughed Trevannagh.

"Heinrich's Hole" was a small section of trench in the middle of No Man's Land and had gained its name from the last tenant, a Boche sniper, who, after having received notice to quit in the shape of numerous bombs, had finally been ejected by a well-aimed trench-mortar shell, though it was probable that parts of him still adhered to the old home. It had always been a coign of vantage in patrol fighting and formed a convenient half-way house for raiding-parties.

"It's quite a sound idea," Trevannagh declared. "None of that Lewis-gun business, though."

"But that's the kernel of the whole notion."

"There was once a company commander," began Trevannagh didactically, "who said to himself, 'I will go out and slay the Boche in large numbers.' Accordingly he took with him a chosen band, armed with a variety of

lethal weapons, among which was a Lewis gun. Now it so happened that the Boche was especially eager to inspect a Lewis gun, for in those historic days they were comparatively scarce. When, therefore, he heard our intrepid friend firing one from the middle of No Man's Land, brother Boche sent out an extra large patrol and, after, an epic struggle, succeeded in snaffling the gun. And is it not written in King's Regulations or elsewhere, 'The battalion that loseth a machine-gun, loseth honour?' "

"And Shahrazad perceived the dawn of day and ceased to say her permitted say," murmured Shannon.

"But what happened to the company commander?" inquired the new subaltern from England, who had a thirst for knowledge and an implicit belief in his superior officers.

Trevannagh stared at him blankly for a moment.

"He was made a town-major?" he concluded severely.

"Well, I must go," declared Shannon in a tone of polite regret. "If Duggie Haig rings up, I shall be in the fire-trench."

"I'm afraid it'll have to be Heinrich's Hole," said Trevannagh, after he had gone. "Whose turn is it for patrol?"

"Mine, sir, I expect," said the new subaltern from England, with that devotion to duty which marks the recently commissioned.

"Oh, we can't start you on a job like this, Ircott." The new subaltern looked disappointed. "I suppose it's old Julian's turn: you were out last night, weren't you, Dick?"

Now there was a law in the battalion that anyone in actual possession of a "Blighty ticket" was immune from every sort of dangerous job, and, though not liking the prospect, Dick felt that it was up to him.

"Yes. But I'll go, Duggie."

Trevannagh hesitated.

"I suppose you think I haven't got the guts for a job like this," said Dick with sudden, nervous irritation.

"Don't be an ass. But it is Julian's turn and, if I turn out to be right, there'll be dirty work at the cross-roads. Wish I could go myself."

"Well, you can't, so that's settled. Heinrich's Hole is about midway between those two gaps the Boche was making in our wire, so we ought to have some fun." Dick tried to speak with relish, but his feelings were a mixture of relief and apprehension—relief that he had taken Shannon's place, apprehension as to what might happen.

"Very well, old thing. You can take a dozen men," said Trevannagh. "You'd better go along and choose them now. Don't pick any duds."

"Right. If Julian raises any protest, tell him I bought Ircott's chance of a decoration off him. This is an M.C. job, Duggie, and don't you forget it."

Two hours later, Dick, followed by his twelve stalwarts, crawled through the barbed wire and headed for Heinrich's Hole. A steady rain was falling, which turned the rank grass to clinging seaweed and the shell-holes to miniature pools. Almost pitch dark, too—a night worthy the pen of Dante or the pencil of Doré. A flare went up from the German lines and Dick threw himself flat. A stray tentacle of wire tore his tunic and arm, but he scarcely noticed it.

"It's all right, sir; they can't see us from 'ere." The sergeant's patrol whisper was no distant relation to the sergeant's parade voice.

"Don't make such a damn noise," said Dick in an irritable murmur. "I say, are we on the right line?"

The sergeant inhaled appreciatively.

"All you got to do is to take a sniff an' march on it, sir. Apart from ole Heinrich, there's several other Fritzes who got done in night before last and ain't been planted yet. You're on the right track, sir."

Reassured, Dick went ahead, his men following him fanwise. Once they were forced by an undirected burst of machine-gun fire to take cover in a shell-puddle. A

swarm of bullets zipped past Dick's head and, as he wriggled further into the hole, he felt the cold slimy water ooze up under his arm-pits.

"Damn," he muttered.

The sergeant corroborated this sentiment less pithily but more profanely and a subdued chuckle from behind hinted at drier cover elsewhere.

"Must be nearly there," whispered Dick. "Tell the men to crawl. Don't let 'em get up again."

With infinite caution, the party crept towards their goal. It was conceivable that they might find the enemy already in possession, in which case the side which spotted the other first was likely to be victorious.

Dick listened attentively.

"D'you hear anything?"

"No, I can't 'ear nothin', sir." The sergeant effectively drowned any noise there might have been.

"For God's sake, don't talk so loud," Dick spoke almost pleadingly. For the moment, the possibility of the Germans having forestalled him seemed a certainty and his courage ebbed away. A burst of rifle-fire at close quarters would have been almost a relief. A ducking in a shell-hole took the guts out of a man, he reflected.

"That's all right, sir," said the sergeant soothingly. "Nobody could 'ear us ten yards away on a night like this. Anyway, the sooner we're there, the better."

The spasm of fear passed, leaving his mind lethargic. "On the belly shalt thou go." The phrase drummed in his brain, vaguely appropriate, but not very helpful. They must be almost there by now. Away to the south the sky was ablaze with gun-flashes—a grand sight, like the first dawn, struggling in the throes of primeval darkness. The further one got away from the war the more picturesque it seemed, until, under the touch of the war-correspondent, it became a fine and noble thing. And yet what a fatuous business it was—playing at boy scouts. . . .

His hand came into contact with a clammy surface, which felt like a layer of wet mud upon wood. Then beneath the slime he touched the folds of a puttec. He jerked his hand away and caught his elbow on a boot. A flare went up and for a second he saw the body distinctly. It lay on its stomach with its head twisted strangely round and the limbs tense with that queer constriction, most noticeable in the thighs and buttocks, which no artist has been able to reproduce. There was nothing peaceful about it, nothing natural—merely something supremely futile. A belated bluebottle, which had gorged itself to sleep, buzzed indignantly away. The flare went out.

To the sergeant this corpse seemed to be a landmark.

“It’s just to the right, sir,” he muttered, and a moment later the lips of the trench yawned in front of them.

About twenty yards along, it was in some places as much as five feet deep, while in others no more than eighteen inches. It was therefore untenable by either side during daylight and it may be presumed that the rival gunners had the range gauged to a nicety. Originally dug by the British as a “strong-point” during a phase of attempted open-warfare, it had been meagrely protected by wire, but this had been almost entirely destroyed by the Germans. Acting under Trevannagh’s instructions, Dick’s party had brought with them a few short stakes and a drum of wire, which they speedily and silently laid out in festoons and trip-wires. To do more than erect the most elementary type of defence was of course impossible, but by running the trip-wires out a long way to either flank, they hoped to obtain warning of the approach of any hostile patrol and to break up its formation. To the left the ground was marshy and almost impassable, while if the attackers were to go round by the right, it would be necessary for them to make a long detour in order to reach their objective. Having completed this job, the men settled down to their vigil, with a vague hope at the

back of their minds that the relief would arrive before any attack should have developed.

At first Dick's senses were keenly alert. His vision was generally limited to a few erring tendrils of barbed wire on his immediate front, but occasionally flares from the German lines lit up his world, turning his men from indistinguishable blobs to surprised, white-faced figures—rather like a flash light photo of a "twenty-first" dinner at Oxford. . . . The grumbling monotone of the guns down south, dominated from time to time by a burst of machine-gun fire close at hand, he scarcely noticed, but the asthmatic breathing of a man near by caused him exquisite annoyance. He splashed along the trench to get away from it. . . . The sour smell of sweat-stained khaki, blended with the stench of decomposing flesh, tainted every breath he inhaled. Eyes may become accustomed to terrible scenes, ears deaf to the crash of bombardment, but to that stale, cloying smell of death no man ever becomes indifferent.

For a time Dick's mind dwelt upon the matter in hand, and he began to appreciate the extreme unwisdom of the whole business. Their presence would soon be discovered, a bombardment by "Minnie" would follow—annihilation. Anyway it was a positive disadvantage to be in a trench at night: one didn't get a chance in a hand-to-hand tussle. Still, there was the comfort of familiarity in being underground.

He began profoundly to regret that he had volunteered for the job. Rough luck getting scuppered with leave waiting for one at the end of the communication-trench, so to speak. He would have had a grand time, too. His mind dwelt longingly, rather sleepily, upon the leave, which he would now, of course, never enjoy. Lunch with Lois, a matinee, dinner, another theatre, perhaps, and then, inevitably, supper and a dance. Could one get supper nowadays or was there some absurd Dora regulation

forbidding it? In any case there was probably some way of arranging these things. He wished Lois could have seen him then, cold, dishevelled, desperate—outwardly, at all events, a real dare-devil.

Unconsciously he posed, peering eagerly into the darkness, with his finger on the trigger of his revolver. The sergeant recalled him from his reverie.

"Thought I 'eard a bit o' movement over there, sir." Dick listened intently, fearfully. Two of the men had brought Verey pistols and a supply of lights, but Dick did not wish to use them unless he was absolutely certain.

"Only the wind," he said curtly. (Pity Lois couldn't hear the decision in his voice.) He looked at his watch. "Five past eight. The Fusiliers ought to be up pretty soon now."

This idea reassured him. It was a rotten night for a raid, he reflected: Fritz wouldn't be coming after all.

He felt that he needed a cigarette—tremendously; willingly would he have bartered his food for the next week for just one whiff of tobacco, but even a spark might provoke instant ruin. He groped his way along the trench to find one of the men hunched up in the mud and snoring peacefully. The ability of the British soldier to sleep in the most improbable places is proverbial. Dick shook him and threatened him with the direst penalties, but the man remained respectfully unimpressed.

"Never meant to drop off, sir, but yer know 'ow it is." He stroked the seat of his trousers appreciatively and finding it wet, swore softly. "Not a wink in five nights, sir." He untied a sandbag which was doing duty as a muffler and experimented behind with a view to greater comfort. Dick grunted and, without realizing the humour of it, stood watching the man working the sandbag into the appropriate position.

And then suddenly things began to happen.

From the front there came a metallic clink as though

some one had stumbled over the trip-wire. Immediately the men detailed for that purpose fired a couple of Verey lights, and for a moment could be seen clearly the figure of a German, blinking stupidly and blindly at them. Several of the men fired and one or two bombs were thrown. The German stood there swaying ponderously, with a queer expression on his fat, bearded face—utter astonishment giving place to anger, as though a stranger had spat in his face in the street. Then as the light went out, he sank forward on his face.

For a minute the British patrol continued a rapid unaimed fire and, in order to be in the fashion, Dick emptied his revolver into the darkness. Further Verey lights failed to reveal anything, the Germans wisely refusing to disclose their position by returning the fire. A minute of silence followed, and then the German gunners, believing their raiding-party to have reached the scheduled position, opened a hurricane fire on the British trenches. Speed rather than accuracy seemed to be their motto, and so frequent were the "shorts" that No Man's Land became decidedly unhealthy and Dick's opinion of Heinrich's Hole as a patrol post was considerably enhanced.

The British guns soon took up the German challenge, but, out of consideration for Dick's party, confined their attention solely to the enemy front-line. For half an hour the rival bombardment continued and during its progress the patrols were too interested in avoiding stray shells to come into contact with each other. Occasional speculative rifle-shots proclaimed their desire to get to grips, but the Germans were too cunning to fire twice from the same spot and it was impossible to discover their position at any given moment. Moreover Dick's orders were to remain under cover. Finding a surprise attack impossible, the German raiding-party, unable to get back to their trenches by the way they had come, owing to the British barrage, crept down No Man's Land on a course parallel to the

lines and re-entered their own trenches outside the fire-zone. This manœuvre was of course undetected by the British patrol, who cautiously remained where they were, until the gunners on both sides, realizing that no infantry attack had developed, began to slacken their fire. Though uncertain as to the whereabouts of the raiding-party, Dick thought it wiser to wait no longer.

"Expect the Fusiliers are up all right by this time," he confided to the sergeant. "And Fritz isn't likely to try another show. You might take a couple of men and see if we've bagged anything. That first chap must be a deader."

And that was the end of the whole business. Silence settled down once more and Dick's party, having suffered no casualties, returned to their own lines, with various identification marks from the German they had shot, by way of trophy. Among these were some letters, and Dick, applying an elementary knowledge of German to one of them, subsequently discovered that their victim was called Max Briffenberg, that he had lived at Bremen and was a married man with three children. An unposted letter to his wife was for the most part beyond Dick's powers, but a few phrases he managed laboriously to decipher. "The English are good soldiers. I cannot feel very bitter against them. Thou rememberest Bob, who would come to see us each time that his ship touched at Bremen? I thought, perhaps, that something might be between him and Elsa—and may still. . . ."

There followed much that was unintelligible and then came a surprisingly vigorous sentence: "Hate is the life-blood of war—it must be that I am anæmic."

"Poor devil," thought Dick with a rare touch of sentiment. "His heart back at Bremen and his body out there."

Here had been a man of intelligence, with an outlook akin to his own. And they had shot him like a dog.

But all that came afterwards. As he clambered back into the trenches, he had a feeling of immense elation. Nothing save a march and a day of boredom between him and leave. A Fusilier officer accosted him as he made his way to the communication-trench :

"D'you often have strafes like this? We came up here for a bit of peace and quiet and the first thing that happens is a quite passable imitation of a battle."

"Oh, you mustn't believe all Fritz says and does," replied Dick, laughing. "He'll be quite good for a few days now. Is the relief complete?"

"Yes. You'll find your skipper at Battalion Headquarters. Afraid a few of your chaps got laid out in the bombardment. We've lost three or four, too."

"Well, I suppose I'll have to toddle. We're going back to rest, you know, and I'm due in Blighty the day after to-morrow," Dick added invidiously.

At Battalion Headquarters he found Trevannagh anxiously waiting for him. "Thank the Lord you're back. I was getting a bit worried about you. Julian's marching the rest of the company back to billets and you and your party had better get along right away. I've got my gee waiting for me, so I'll be there before you."

Dick returned to billets to find Trevannagh in perspiring converse with the daughter of the house, while Shannon watched them with an air of superior amusement. Negotiations for the purchase of eggs and a chicken were in progress, but the lady was apparently not going to be seduced into a bargain by an alluring smile and half a dozen French words lamentably mispronounced.

"Avez-vous des oofs et un poule?"

"J'sais pas, m'sieu : je vais demander à maman."

"Combien donc? Damn it, Julian, you might help a fellow out. I'll resign my mess-presidency and order bully-beef all round."

"Je comprends pas, m'sieu."

"Dites-donc. That's an idiom, my lad, that is. We might have that again. Dites-donc : ne parley-vous pas anglais ? "

"Mais oui, m'sieu." The lady beamed at him coquetishly. "Nowty boy. Kiss me, keed. You comb wiz me to-night."

"It is easy to observe that mademoiselle has studied under the first masters," said Shannon gravely.

"Well, if you've had enough fun, Julian, you might finish the deal. Hullo, Dickie, didn't see you. You been enjoying the 'Grand Tableau Vivant de l'Entente Cordiale,' too ? "

"Let's get some food and go to bed. I'm dog-tired," said Dick. "Any old thing'll do."

"First night in billets without an omelette ? " asked Trevannagh in a scandalized voice. "Shell-shock, I'm afraid. It does take 'em that way sometimes."

By now Shannon had coaxed the lady into supplying a dozen eggs, a frying-pan and her own assistance ; she even prophesied a chicken for the morrow with confidence.

An orderly arriving with the mail drove them indoors.

"One from Dol," cried Trevannagh fatuously.

"Two from Lois," Dick retorted.

"An' one from my tailor," murmured Shannon.

There was a long pause, while the mail was digested, Shannon watching the others with an indulgent smile.

"It's good to be back in billets," he said at length.

"Especially without Barford," added Dick.

Barford was one of the battalion failures. In civil life he had been a draper's assistant and one of his fellow-employees was serving in the ranks. How he had obtained a commission remained a mystery. He had been sent out with a draft to reinforce the battalion, but after one tour of trenches and two of billets, he had succumbed to a timely but undiagnosed disease and had gratefully vanished in the direction of the base. While regretting

that nothing more drastic had happened to him, the regiment was too pleased to lose him to inquire into the authenticity of his ailment.

"We'll have that pal of his in the A.S.C. round in a moment," Trevannagh declared. "I saw him in the village mucking about round that dump, and he's sure to drop in for a drink. Horrible thing, war!"

"Of the two I prefer Barford," said Dick after reflection.

Hardly had he spoken before the door opened and the subject of their conversation entered. So pleased was Trevannagh to be proved a true prophet that he greeted him almost affectionately.

"Hullo! Where's ole Barf?" demanded the new-comer.

"Haven't you heard about him?" asked Shannon gravely.

"No. What's wrong?"

"I'm afraid Barford's for it. There's some talk about a court-martial. Self-inflicted wound, you know."

"Self-inflicted wound," repeated the other, mystified.

"What the 'ell d'you mean?"

"Terribly cut about the mouth, poor chap," said Shannon musingly.

"What the devil are you talking about? What happened?"

"Well, you see, he was eating peas," said Shannon slowly.

It was nearly a minute before this remark took effect, and then without another word the intruder strode out of the room, slamming the door.

"That was a damn caddish thing to have said," Shannon confessed. "I wish I hadn't done it."

"Nonsense," said Dick, recovering from a fit of laughter.

"Serve the beggar right. I endorse the remark I heard mam'selle make about him the other day, when he tried to kiss her. 'Je n'aime pas ces gens sans education.'"

"What is education?" asked Trevannagh lazily—in much

the same way, one imagines, that Pontius Pilate demanded "What is Truth?"

Shannon took up the challenge without delay.

"Education," he said, "is the sediment of things forgotten. That sounds so like a quotation that I think it must be one."

Ircott, who had just joined them, gazed at him with an air of amazed respect. With a zeal only displayed during the early days of active service, he had been holding an immediate foot-inspection and was consequently rather depressed and disinclined for conversation.

"It's no use firing intellectual Verey lights to illuminate a dark subject like this," said Dick.

Ircott looked profoundly puzzled.

"It's all right: they're off," Trevannagh assured him, and leaving Dick and Shannon to it, they began supper.

"It was a very helpful remark," Shannon maintained. "At school one collected all sorts of interesting information and now only remembers the more fatuous bits of it. Take yourself, for example. You were once a history scholar. What d'you remember now? The date of the Battle of Hastings, a few obsolete provisions of Magna Charta and some scandal about Queen Elizabeth."

"But——" Dick began, but Shannon cut him short.

"Education is all wrong. Nowadays it produces cynicism. It destroys religion and tries to set up science in its place. The more one learns, the less one believes. Knowledge kills faith. People have begun to explain God, and in a few years the New Testament will exist only as a piece of archaic philosophy. Education or civilization—they're synonymous terms—banishes simplicity and makes life so complex that it isn't worth living. I'd rather be an ape that really believed in the divinity of a coco-nut than a twentieth-century genius who believes in nothing at all."

"You old weather-cock," shouted Dick, "you're a fine apostle of primitive faiths." He paused to collect his

forces for a counter-attack, when Ircott gave vent to his one pertinent remark.

"I don't see what all this has got to do with the war," he said.

Thereafter the conversation veered back to the topic of leave.

"Clean sheets," murmured Trevannagh luxuriously, "and a hot-water bottle."

"Not one of those stone contraptions," Shannon amended. "A rubber one : they're more companionable."

"Lois," mumbled Dick.

"Dolores," retorted Trevannagh.

"Oh, go to bed before you get maudlin," cried Shannon. "Besides, you're undermining Ircott's sense of duty."

The following day, Shannon and Trevannagh went on leave. "We'll meet the Blighty train a couple of evenings after we get across," they told Dick, as they waited for a stray lorry to take them down to rail-head. "We can have a drink then and discuss plans."

"I'm going to dine at home the first night, whatever happens," Dick insisted. "My people are coming up to town on purpose : it'll be the first time the house has been open for over two years."

"We're not going to lure you from the family circle," Shannon assured him. "Not the first night at all events, though I rather think that the 'Bing Boys' is indicated for your second evening."

"Anything you like. . . . Hullo ; here's an R.F.C. tender coming. Throw your chest out and try and look like a colonel, Duggie."

And so, two days later, Dick followed them. Of his journey it is needless to say much : an interminable jolting in a cattle-truck (the R.T.O. seemed to have mislaid all the carriages), sleepy halts at unpronounceable stations, a scramble for rooms at the *Hotel du Louvre* in Boulogne, a successful effort to avoid duty on embarkation, depressing

symptoms of stomachic Bolshevism, and then—the white cliffs of Dover: to mention these is to forge for many a chain of intimate personal reminiscence.

Everything was lit with the sun of good humour. Brigadiers became human and lesser brass-hats achieved an ephemeral popularity. In the train conversation hinged upon revue, and one man, who inadvertently mentioned Ypres, was condemned to ignominious confinement in the lavatory.

Just outside Victoria the train slowed down and then, as every one scrambled for his kit, came to a stop. Peering through the window they found no platform to welcome them, and just as they were settling down again, the lights went out. A growl of indignation and protest rose from every compartment, but for five minutes the train remained motionless and in darkness. Finally, with an air of indecision, it crept furtively into Victoria.

A tactiturn "Jock," who seemed rather depressed at the prospect of meeting his family after a year's absence, was the first to diagnose the symptoms.

"I hev it," he cried with his first approach to cheerfulness. "An airre raid."

As if in corroboration came instantly the banging of maroons and, as it died away, the boom of a distant gun.

"Gad, what a piece of luck," said some one, voicing the general opinion.

Trailing a swollen haversack, containing among other treasures a Boche helmet for Lois and four different kinds of German bayonets, with which to scare his mother, Dick raced along the platform to find Trevannagh and Shannon waiting for him behind the barrier.

"One simply can't get away from this war," he declared. "It seems to follow me."

"I'd like to be in a big London hotel when a midnight bomb drops alongside," said Shannon meditatively. "There must be some extraordinary sights."

But Trevannagh was not going to be balked of his drink by a mere air-raid.

The bar, to which he led them, presented an astonishing spectacle. On one side, scores of thirsty warriors clamoured for refreshment, while on the other, a solitary barmaid, like some feminine Casabianca, strove to cope with a multiplicity of orders.

"French and Italian," demanded a superb staff-subaltern, "one must support one's allies."

"All right, Port," grunted a flea-bitten major by way of repartee, "our oldest ally."

"Wonder where the rest of the staff have got to," grumbled Trevannagh. "Not the red-tabbed crowd, the barmaid brigade. If it's the cellar, I don't mind taking cover myself, provided I get alongside something crusted. Three double scotch, please. . . . That girl deserves the V.C."

Meanwhile the clamour of the barrage became louder, more immediate. Urgent special constables created frequent diversion by rushing in to suggest the cellar and the local Tube as alternative refuges. A girl, who had drifted into the bar in the hope of forming a temporary alliance with some one, fainted and was amply revived by a Canadian officer. And through it all the barmaid filled orders with unfailing precision and promptitude.

Then, drowning the din of the bombardment, came the thud of a bomb.

"Out Mayfair way, I should imagine," said a sound-ranging officer with an air of authority.

"Rotten luck for the mater, having an air-raid her first night in town," said Dick.

"Let's cut along as soon as we can," Trevannagh suggested. "Buck your people up no end to see us."

"Lead on, Macduff," said Shannon. "I think——"

His sentence was cut short by a terrific explosion near by, which shattered the windows and the glasses on the counter.

Headed by the major, carrying the now hysterical barmaid in his arms, the whole party rushed across the road to seek sanctuary in the Tube station opposite. Down there, fear seemed to have stripped souls naked. Gone was the drab everyday garment of conventional insincerity. At the foot of the stairs an old man with the evil face of a satyr was praying calmly and coherently, while beside him a clergyman criticized each explosion with ripe and ready blasphemy. Some of the women were weeping steadily, while others eyed the sudden inrush of officers with expectant greed. Only the babies seemed normal, staring up at their hysterical mothers with wide, uncomprehending eyes. Altogether a topsy-turvy, indecent sort of world—a world frankly dominated by emotion.

Like a shower of rain, the bombardment became slower, more intermittent, and then stopped altogether, but the majority of the refugees made no attempt to move. They had been caught before by a second squadron of raiders and were taking no risks.

The three friends emerged into an unfamiliar world. A bomb had fallen some few hundred yards away, totally destroying two houses and spattering the streets with debris and broken glass. A soldier sitting on the surviving three-foot pinnacle of what had once been the outer wall of a house, accosted them with the sardonic humour of the Cockney. He pointed to his right arm dangling absurdly from his tunic. "Couple of years in France without a scratch an' then to get done in by a ruddy air-raid. They'd never a' done it, if they'd seen me souvenir 'elmet." He indicated a Pickelhaube, slung over his unwounded shoulder. "Say la gear. Looks like a bit o' Wipers round 'ere, don't it, sir?"

They did what they could for him until the ambulance arrived—an ambulance manned by special constables, who manifestly regarded them as wholly unfitted to deal with such grim occurrences.

"We can't, of course, give you any information yet," said one of them, although nobody had questioned him. "But I'm afraid there's a good deal of damage. Dozens of casualties," he added impressively.

"Still, I reckon it's all over now," declared another reassuringly. "In my opinion, you'll be safe to get home—or wherever you're bound for."

Thanking them without irony, they hastened on towards Dick's house. By this time the streets were beginning to fill again and people were standing in their doorways discussing the raid, for all the world like mice, peering out of their holes to make sure that the cat had really gone. Neighbours who had been lifelong enemies were offering each other fragments of shrapnel with garrulous courtesy, while groups of total strangers proclaimed to an uninterested world their own sang-froid and the cowardice of every one else.

Piccadilly was alive with an ever-increasing throng and it was some time before they could force their way through. The nearer Dick got to his goal, the more difficult became his progress, until, as he attempted to turn into the familiar street, he found himself confronted by a cordon of "specials."

"Stand back: you can't pass through here," said a sergeant—a stubby, bearded little man, smug, officious, competent. Dick hated him.

"What the hell d'you mean?" he demanded angrily.

"Orders are orders. We've been told to let nobody through."

"But I live here." And then suddenly fear caught him by the throat. "I live here," he repeated hoarsely.

A dozen times in the past five minutes had people assured the sergeant that they lived there, and each time he had answered with increasing unction that orders were orders. But there was something about Dick which carried conviction.

“Well, perhaps if you ask . . .” he temporized. Dick thrust him aside and ran wildly on towards his home.

A party of men digging furiously; another group with stretchers—waiting; a mass of debris across the road; one blackened wall, grotesquely intact: and over all a bank of yellow smoke drifting serenely upward to the pitiless stars.

CHAPTER III

DICK returned to France, stunned, unable to appreciate the extent of his loss, yet alive to its fateful and dramatic quality. His father, mother and uncle, gathered together to greet him on his return, had been struck down by the hand which for ten long months had spared him. His home, though it had not given him an ideal companionship, had been his background : something stable, permanent, dependable. And now, in a moment, all that had disappeared, leaving a gap impossible to fill. It seemed to him that his childhood had been buried along with those charred fragments which they had been able to recover from the wreckage and that, the continuity of his life being broken, he was thrown naked upon an unfamiliar world. Though he had found more sympathy with his uncle than with the others, it was to his mother that his thoughts most frequently turned and the shrine, which had been closed to the living woman, was opened to the dead ; for the contemptuous affection with which he had been wont to treat her gave place to a legend of a wise and perfect motherhood. Death crowns the whole world with a halo.

Scorning to apply for an extension of leave, Dick went back to France without even seeing Lois, for he felt somehow that the pleasure he must enjoy in her society would be a kind of treachery to his grief. She was at Brighton convalescing apparently from a spasmodic attack of V.A.D. work, and her letters of sympathy, interlarded with petty

complaints, rather irritated him. By never referring to the tragedy save when he invited them to do so, Shannon and Trevannagh did all that sympathy and comradeship could do to heal the wound, but what perhaps helped him most to forget was the news, soon after his return, of an impending British attack on a large scale.

This offensive was heralded by intense aerial activity on both sides. All day long scouting planes droned overhead to be replaced at night by the deeper hum of the bombing machines. Meanwhile the rival artillery, in preparation for the coming struggle, economized ammunition, and, infantry fighting being limited to reconnaissance work, popular interest was focused exclusively on the war in the air.

One evening in billets, as the three friends were sitting at dinner, Trevannagh, the proud possessor of a three days old newspaper, suddenly gave vent to a cry of astonishment.

"By Gad! Listen to this. End of German official: 'Captain Baron von Ecke to-day secured his 17th and 18th aerial victories.' What a joke! I wonder if the old blighter's on this front—bad cess to him!"

"Well, I'm damned!" said Dick.

"Yes, but that's not the cream of it. There's a whole article about him, written by a lad who signs himself 'Parachute'—a kite-balloon merchant, I suppose." He ran his eye down the page, chuckling happily.

"There's a paragraph of tosh about Fritz's wrong-headed notions of how to make a plane, and then comes a heading in black type, 'Captain von Ecke.—A young airman who has rapidly achieved fame, at any rate in his own country, is Captain Baron von Ecke. Unknown a fortnight ago, no German *communiqué* now seems complete without him, and to-day he has to his credit, though one should of course accept the figures with reservations, a long list of victories. While it would be unfair and un-

British to impugn either his courage or his skill, we are unwilling to believe that as *preux chevalier de l'air* he can challenge comparison with the leading allied airmen.' *Preux chevalier de l'air* is pretty good for a sausage merchant. 'For in the eyes of decent-minded people he has irremediably smirched his shield and forfeited his claim to that respect which Englishmen are ever ready to extend to a gallant foeman.' That's a good old Macaulayflower. 'It is from a German source that we learn that Captain von Ecke was the leader——'" Trevannagh broke off abruptly and laid down the paper.

"Well?" asked Dick and Shannon at once.

"Damn it. I've lost the place," he said lamely.

Dick picked it up unsuspectingly. "Let's have a look. Where are we? . . . 'We learn that Captain von Ecke was the leader of the last two air-raids on London. . . .' My God! And to think that perhaps it was he who—— A man who's dined with us . . . often . . . And mother was so fond of him." His face went white and his lips trembled. "I pray to Almighty God that——" He broke off abruptly and brought his fist down with a crash on the table. "Oh, Christ," he cried helplessly.

"Steady Dick, no one can ever know whether it was he or not."

Dick's face worked convulsively but he did not speak. There was a long silence, and finally Shannon, taking the paper from him, finished reading the article.

"That he should fly a heavy night-bombing machine as well as a scout proves his versatility and eagerness if not his chivalry. Over the lines in France his presence can be detected by the gold-painted aeroplane which he invariably flies. Let us hope that this gaudy dragon-fly will soon be added to the large allied collection of similar noxious insects."

"May his soul smoulder in hell," cried Dick.

Though understanding his extreme bitterness, the other

two found it difficult to sympathize with him. To them this rediscovery of Von Ecke was a colossal joke. Hun he certainly was, yet somehow they could not hate him: that formal little bow of his—a thing of sheer delight—and that amazing capacity for beer and philosophy in the early hours of the morning. In fact, he had been their very good friend. Air-raids over London were a damnable business, but one somehow couldn't associate Von Ecke with anything fundamentally base and cruel. They sought excuses for him. The thrill of adventure must have blinded him to the obvious crime of killing non-combatants, or perhaps he really believed the German picture of London as a fortified camp.

"Perhaps he couldn't help it," said Trevannagh. "Had to obey orders, I expect. It's not his fault he was born a Fritz. You can't tar the entire nation with the same brush."

"I do."

"It's hard to believe that seventy millions of people haven't got a case," said Shannon.

"Don't talk such bloody nonsense, Julian. We're not dealing with abstractions. You chaps don't seem to understand that we're discussing the man, who, in all probability, killed my mother and father. If I could have thought well of any German, I'd have thought well of Von Ecke. He was our friend. But if you ask me not to hate the man who murdered my people, I tell you it's impossible. Supposing we both survive the war and I meet him afterwards, I'd shoot him in cold blood if I got the chance. It mayn't conform to your fine sporting instincts," he sneered, "but it would at least be elementary justice."

"You say so now, Dick, but I don't believe you'd do it."

"You think I shouldn't have the guts?"

"No. Duggie and I understand, old chap, and sympathize with you—but let's talk about something else."

Dick did not have to wait long for his vengeance. The battalion was once again in reserve, and C and D com-

panies, always great rivals, celebrated the occasion by a football match, one of a series extending over some three years. Though the personnel of the teams changed constantly owing to casualties, Trevannagh at centre-half and Dick and Shannon at back had become inevitable, almost traditional figures, and their back-chat during the game was justly considered one of the chief attractions. After a lengthy absence the sun reappeared and the gunners on both sides determined to make the most of the improved visibility. From an adjoining field a kite-balloon flopped lazily into the sky and, having reported a fair view, drove his brethren up by force of example.

The game was at its height, when the spectators were treated to a yet more engrossing thrill. Assisted by ribald encouragement from the touch-line, Dick was skilfully dribbling the ball round an ancient shell-hole, when a sudden shout halted him.

“Gawd! There’s a Fritz over, balloon-straffing.”

Than a kite-balloon in flames there is no grander nor more terrible sight—a sight of which the infantry never grew weary and, next to Brigade Headquarters being shelled, the most popular sideshow of the war. By mutual consent the game was abandoned and all eyes were fixed on a balloon next but one in the line to their own presiding deity. Round it circled a dark speck, seemingly loth to administer the *coup de grâce*.

“Waiting for ’em to jump before ’e poops off,” said one of the men appreciatively. “’E’s a sport, that’s what ’e is!”

A second later a couple of parachutes fluttered out under the basket of the doomed balloon. Another second and a black bunch of smoke seemed to gather round the nose of the “sausage,” which tilted up like a stricken ship about to take the final plunge. Then suddenly the whole thing burst into flame and came crashing to earth like a meteor,

Having accomplished this design, the intruder derisively looped the loop and then headed straight for the next balloon. As it banked gracefully, the sun caught the plane, turning it from a black silhouette into a golden butterfly. There was a chorus of pleased recognition.

“ Why, it's old Von Wrecker 'isselt ! ”

Meanwhile the balloons in the danger-zone were making frantic efforts to escape. The motor-winch in the adjoining field started up with a roar, trying vainly to fulfil its advertisement of taking up twelve hundred feet of cable a minute. The watchers below could see the basket bucketing uncomfortably four thousand feet above them, while some even averred that the observers were sitting on the edge of the basket, waiting to jump. There was a generally expressed desire for a parachute descent. . . .

Anti-aircraft guns, making much ineffectual noise, spattered the sky with fleecy clouds of shrapnel. To the men on the ground the inaccuracy of their marksmanship seemed extraordinary. A balloon-hand near by, just out from England and determined to get on more intimate terms with the war, gave vent to his excitement by loosing off long bursts from his Lewis gun, directing his fire with much impartiality at a homing British plane, four miles away to the southward.

With only an occasional glance skyward, Shannon watched Dick intently. The latter stood motionless, staring upward, his face devoid of expression. He might have been praying. He gave a little gasp as the second balloon fell a victim to the raider, but his gaze, fixed on the aeroplane, took in neither the blazing envelope nor the white parachutes swaying gracefully earthward.

All interest was now focused upon the balloon immediately above them. As a race against time there was a sporting element about it all, which appealed to the men and drove them to yells of encouragement. The gas-bag was still at somewhere about three thousand feet, while

the aeroplane, as near as they could judge, was between two and three miles away. To attack a balloon at anything under fifteen hundred feet is to become the target of every machine gun in the neighbourhood and had never been a popular pastime with the German airmen. For the ninety seconds or so which it would take the raider to reach the balloon, the latter would have descended to about 1,500 feet. That at all events was the opinion of the experts, and some brisk betting was done in half francs at even money. The anti-aircraft guns became more frenzied and the Lewis gun enthusiast, still innocent of aim, emptied a drum in one hectic burst and retired from the proceedings with a sense of duty well done.

And then came the climax of the drama. Seemingly from nowhere a squadron of British machines dived down on to the tail of the raider. The whole thing happened in a few seconds. Apparently disdaining these new antagonists, the German opened fire on the balloon, and only when the first streak of smoke assured him that his work was done did he turn to face his enemies. Followed an exhibition of aerial acrobatics in which it was impossible for the men on the ground to distinguish friend from foe. The anti-aircraft batteries ceased fire and the rattle of machine-guns was the only accompaniment to the battle. A plane dropped headlong out of the fight, righted itself, and then crashed heavily into a copse—a British plane, one deduced, since the firing still continued. The golden machine seemed to be climbing, heading towards its own lines, and then again the watchers lost its identity in the whirligig of the *melée*. The end came without warning. One moment it seemed certain that Von Ecke would escape, the next he was spinning earthward with a smudge of flame spreading along the fusillage. When only a thousand feet from the ground the plane appeared to come under control again and the flames to have been extinguished. The machine headed straight for the field,

scattering the footballers in all directions, and landed clumsily but apparently safely.

At once the men rushed over to see what had happened, and Dick, after standing a moment irresolute, followed them. Of the forepart of the fusillage there remained nothing but some charred wreckage. That the flames had let go their prey at all was due probably to the terrific rush of air as the plane fell headlong. The legs of the pilot, strapped into his seat, were terribly burned, but the head, sheltered by his arms, was untouched. At first gaze, the face of the dead man looked serene and triumphant. The lips were parted in that quaint, apologetic smile that was to Dick so familiar. It was only when one lifted the goggles and peered into the eyes that one understood the ultimate agony of death. In them lay written the secrets of pain, fear, despair—a message unfit for any man to read. If some hint of resignation lurked in that pitiful smile, it had not communicated itself to the eyes, and these men, who walked with Death as a daily companion, turned away uneasily from the horror of that stare.

For several minutes Dick stood looking down at the face of his old friend. The ever-increasing crowd of soldiers he scarcely noticed. At first his face was hard, critical, even sneering. His primitive instinct of revenge was gratified and the swift terror of it titillated his sense of the dramatic. But no one could look for long at that pitiful, broken thing and remain unmoved. Death squares all accounts, thought Dick, and even in that moment cursed himself for a commonplace sentimentalist. Odd memories hurried through his brain—Bridge-parties, evenings spent on the river (intolerably remote, these), debates on Nietzschean philosophy. And then how charming Von Ecke had always been to his mother and how fond she had been of him! His mother. . . . At that, he came near to spitting in the dead man's face. And then another revulsion of feelings swept over him. Poor old Von Ecke!—

a kindly, sociable soul, caught in this inexplicable upheaval and driven into a crime from which, had not this witless hatred blinded him, his whole being would have shrunk. Obeying some uncontrollable impulse, Dick stooped down and with infinite tenderness took the hard, unresponsive hand in his. The men watched him wonderingly. With the guilty feeling of having done something theatrical, he rose abruptly and turned away. How pleased Julian would be to find that he had correctly answered this problem in psychology! Funny thing, human nature! . . . Emotions were never reliable. . . .

He turned to find himself confronted by a young flying officer who, unnoticed by the men, now busily engaged in collecting souvenirs, had driven up in a tender.

"I suppose that really is Von Ecke? I was having tea with the balloonatics and saw the whole scrap. Poor devil! Good sportsman, he was. I'll take the body back with me in the car. The boys are sure to want to give him a slap-up funeral. Show 'em there's some—er—chivalry left in modern war." He looked at Dick curiously, suspiciously. "I say, did you know the late lamented?"

Dick turned his back on him.

"Let's finish the match," he said evenly.

For a few days this tragedy of Von Ecke exercised Dick immensely, until a more personal and immediate loss drove it from his mind. The battalion was sent back to the line in order to take part in the great new offensive—that offensive which was always going to end the war—and never did. While the war in the air continued with unabated vigour, the war on the ground awakened from its fitful dose to a new phase of activity. During daylight the artillery maintained a ceaseless bombardment, while night was made hideous by constant raids and skirmishes between patrols.

All day long a heavy artillery duel had been in progress, but as the light failed, calm settled for a moment upon the

battlefield. Gunners, after all, are only human and cannot indefinitely forgo their meals. Possibly swayed by this knowledge, the Brigade-Major chose that half hour after dusk for visiting the line. It had been an unhealthy day and valuable lives must not be lightly risked. Besides in another hour there was bound to be a certain amount of raiding, which was usually accompanied by some rather wild gunnery. Raiding! It was here that the staff-mind, hitherto divided between fear and the sartorial subtlety of a pair of white breeches, hitched itself on to the purely minor problem of the war. The Brigade-Major had so far escaped decoration, not, be it understood, through any want of pushfulness, but owing to a lack of just appreciation on the part of the Brigadier, and he felt that a D.S.O. was exactly what was needed to set off his new tunic. The Brigade-Major stumbled and tore his favourite pair of puttees on some barbed wire. It was this that decided him—and incidentally signed the death warrant of a dozen brave men. He would show the General and the Boche and the people at home what war really was. He would order a raid on his own. The Brigadier was always keen on patrol work, had even hinted that his brigade took too little interest in it. Only that morning he had talked about lack of identification of the enemy troops in that sector. Splendid thing, raiding: maintained the spirit of the offensive. Besides, there was that D.S.O. . . .

In the communication-trench he met Trevannagh discussing things with the Sergeant-major.

“Evening, Trevannagh.”

“Good evening, sir. Rotten day we’ve had.”

The Brigade-Major felt this to be a reflection upon his war.

“Really,” he said acidly.

“Yes, sir. Ten casualties—three killed.”

“What’s the strength of your company?”

"With the new draft we were up to one hundred and sixty this morning. A hundred and fifty odd now!"

"Um. I've been thinking . . ." said the Brigade-Major, and paused.

"The General was only saying this morning that he hadn't got any identification of the troops opposing this sector. Well, most of the other companies in the brigade aren't up to more than a hundred and thirty, so you can afford to lose a few casualties in a raid. Must have identification: most important. Well. . . . Look here, you'd better ring up your C.O. and tell him the General wants a raid to be carried out on his front and that I've suggested your company for the job. I haven't time to go along and see him myself. If you've got a trench-map handy, we'll get along to your dug-out and work out a scheme of sorts."

"I suppose you know, sir, that the wire in front of us isn't cut at all at present. The gunners in this particular sector only pulled in this afternoon and haven't started work yet."

"Of course I know that," snapped the other. It was chiefly owing to faulty liaison work on his part that the artillery had not arrived earlier. "What of it?"

Trevannagh knew his brigade-major. He shrugged his shoulders. "Very well, sir."

Inside the dug-out, the Brigade-Major, heedless of any enemy listening apparatus, rang up the Colonel and announced the news. The latter did not attempt a remonstrance, which he knew must in the end prove futile. He was aware of the Brigadier's weakness and aware also that at his last meeting with the divisional general he had been accused of being miserly with the lives of his men—an imputation which as a soldier he justly resented and which in true army fashion he had passed on to his subordinates.

Having settled the matter with the Colonel, the Brigade-Major did not waste much time over working out the

details of the scheme. A certain amount of harassing fire had broken out and he felt that his duties claimed him elsewhere. He left with the comfortable conviction that, if all went well, the Brigadier would be forced to recognize his vigour and initiative, while if the raid was a failure the Colonel and any survivor of the raiding party would share the blame.

After he had gone, Trevannagh sat for some time, whistling dolefully, and then suddenly brightened.

‘I’ve got a damn fine notion of how I’m going to spend my gratuity,’ he announced.

Dick, who was in a semi-comatose condition, grunted.

“I shall go about kicking every brass hat I can find. Now, one would get shot for it, but after the war it would only be a common assault—forty shillings or seven days.”

“How d’you know you’ll live to draw a gratuity?”

“Now then, mournful Maurice,” cried Trevannagh, shying a Verey light at him. “If you don’t stop being offensive, I’ll send you over to the Boche lines on this raiding stunt.”

Secure in the knowledge that it was not his turn for patrol duty, Dick laughed. ‘Yet in some queer, incomprehensible way he felt afraid.

“Ircott’ll never forgive either of us, if you do,” he said.

To Shannon, entering a few minutes later, the glad tidings were imparted. Instead of a tirade against the staff, which they had expected, he said nothing, and it was only as Dick was going out to take over trench-duty that he referred to the matter.

“About that stunt, Duggie. I’d rather like to go.”

“Well, you won’t. Half a mo, Dick. I’ll come along with you.”

Whether Douglas had already made up his mind or whether it was due to the impulse of the moment, Dick never knew. Conceivably it may have hung upon one of those trivialities which are the hinges of important

decisions. From across the way, the Germans, inspired probably by a beer-ration, struck up, "Deutschland über Alles," singing, as they always did, really well. When it was finished there was some applause from the British lines and the performers responded with further items.

If there was any vanity in Trevannagh, it was a belief that he had a voice. His great popularity with the men caused his rendering of the "Trumpeter" at battalion concerts to be always vigorously encored, and this had served to strengthen the idea. Taking up the German challenge, Trevannagh retorted with, "There's a long, long trail," but had only got through a few lines, when he broke down on a high note. Immediately boos and yells came from the German lines, to be followed by the more pointed criticism of a burst of machine-gun fire. Dick laughed, but Trevannagh cursed angrily.

"By God, I'll teach those swine manners."

"My dear Duggie, why this heat? You don't expect the poor devils to sit still under your vocal frightfulness." Trevannagh grinned, feeling ashamed of his outburst.

"Well, anyway, I'll take that raiding party across to-night and cut a few throats. So perish all critics."

"Afraid you can't. O.C. companies are confined to trenches."

"Can't I? Who's going to stop me? I've said I will, and I'm going to." And he went off to consult the Sergeant-major.

Further along the trench Dick met Shannon.

"Duggie insists on going out on this show to-night."

"Nonsense," snapped Shannon.

"It's perfectly true and I really don't see why he shouldn't, if he wants to. I think he gets fed up with sending us out on these dud jobs and wants to have a bit of a show himself. You know how he hates letting any one else do the dirty work."

"He must be stopped. There was a note of apprehension in Shannon's voice.

"Well, you try and stop him. What the devil's the matter with you, Julian?"

"Nothing; only Duggie mustn't go."

"Well, you try and stop him," Dick repeated.

Half an hour later the three friends met for supper, and it was then that Shannon made his appeal. But Trevannagh remained obdurate.

"Why the Hades shouldn't I do a job of work now and again? Besides, I want to explore the Hun Trenches before the big show. I'll teach brother Boche to give me the 'bird.' He's got no appreciation of decent music."

"Duggie, don't go to-night. Let one of us go to-night and you try your luck some other time." He spoke in a voice of urgent entreaty. Dick looked at him curiously and began to feel vaguely ill at ease. Fear is the most infectious of all diseases.

"Yes, don't go to-night, Duggie," he said.

"But why not? It's a perfectly good night and I've been feeling extraordinarily brave all day. I'm going to slay the Hun in heaps!" Then he, too, became affected by the atmosphere of disquiet. "Julian, d'you remember that evening on board . . ." he began, and paused, pretending to grope in the recesses of his memory.

"What evening?" asked Shannon quickly.

"Oh, nothing! Only don't try to put the wind up a fellow!"

Until it was time for the raiding party to leave, Shannon did his best to dissuade Trevannagh from his purpose, but only succeeded in making him more obstinate and even angry.

"You're talking like a damned old woman. I'll have you put under arrest when I come back for trying to upset the morale of the troops."

"Well, let me come with you at all events,"

Trevannagh shook his head. "You silly old ass," he said affectionately, and with a curt order to the men, climbed over the parapet.

Though possessed of an indefinable malaise, Dick could not understand the emotional agony of Shannon, who, as though unable to control himself, hurried aimlessly up and down the fire-trench.

"You're all on edge to-night, old chap; like a cat on hot bricks. What's wrong?"

"You wouldn't understand and I can't tell you. You'd only think I was mad."

Dick shrugged his shoulders. "You will be, if you go on like this."

As he spoke, the desultory sniping that had been in progress quickened to rapid fire and the ceaseless stutter of machine-guns, punctuated by the crash of bombs, informed them that the raiding party had come to grips with the enemy. At each concussion Shannon flinched like a frightened child.

"My God, they knew we were coming," he cried, his voice breaking into a high-pitched sob. "That blasted fool of a brigade-major! They're killing him, Dick, they're killing him."

Shaken himself, Dick seized him by the arm.

"Don't be a fool. You can't expect to have a raid without a certain amount of noise, and anyway, hysteria doesn't help much."

With an effort Shannon pulled himself together.

"You're right. I suppose we can't do anything. And as you say, hysteria doesn't help. But I'm frightened, damned frightened."

For a few minutes the firing maintained its crescendo and then died down again to its previous intermittence, though the Germans continued to put up a vast quantity of rockets. The two friends waited in an agony of suspense. Shannon dabbed his forehead nervously with his handkerchief,

and the queer thought came to Dick that hardly ever, not even after a hard game of tennis, had he known Julian sweat. The seconds ticked by, each of them a twist to their nerves, already taut to cracking point. At last they heard a low challenge, followed by some frightened profanity, and then a dark form stumbled over the parapet and dropped into the trench.

“What’s happened?”

The man was unwounded but badly scared.

“Oh, Gawd,” he panted.

Recognizing him as one of his own men, Shannon seized him by the shoulder and shook him roughly.

“Pull yourself together, Jevons. Where’s Captain Trevannagh?”

Conscious of an audience, the man launched into a long story.

“The barstards were waiting for us, sir. Must a known we was coming. We got across all right an’ lay doggo, while the Captin and Sergeant White crawled on to cut the wire. Then suddenly up goes ’arf a dozen lights and they lets us ’ave it proper. Christ!”

A generous friend handed him the dregs of his rum ration and he swallowed noisily.

“Up jumps the Captin and yells. ‘Come on, boys!’ he yells. I see ’im pot one of ’em ’imself. But it weren’t no ruddy good; we couldn’t get through the wire, not properly through. An’ the boys went down like nine-pins. ’Ell it was, absolute ’ell! Not that they got away with it altogether, sir. I got one of ’em in the belly with a Mills,” he chuckled reminiscently. “When there was only seven or eight of us left, Captin shouts for us to run for it. Last I see of ’im, ’e was carryin’ Sergeant White, who’d a packet in the ’ed somewhere. About ’arf way across they was, as near as I could judge.” He saw the pain in Shannon’s face, and knowing, as every one did, the great friendship of the three inseparables, was

touched. "I don't think the Captin's 'it, sir. Not when I saw 'im last, any'ow." He turned to the group of men anxiously awaiting news of their comrades. "Buster's got 'is—an' poor ole Smivvy. Spud bought a Blightly one in the arm. Don't know nuthin' about the others."

By this time five more stragglers had returned. Three of these could give no news of Trevannagh, but the other two deposed to the fact that they had seen him lying, wounded, in a shell-crater. Apparently he had carried the sergeant half-way across No Man's Land and, leaving him in the comparative safety of the shell-hole, had gone back to see if he could find any others. This time he had been hit, but had managed to crawl back with another wounded man to the shell-hole, and all three were now waiting for a stretcher party.

The need for action calmed Shannon.

"Shell-hole," he kept muttering. "My God, I knew it." And then with sudden decision. "You two'll come back and lend a hand? Good men! Four volunteers wanted. No, only four. You've got the stretchers? Come on, Dick!"

But the habit of military discipline had bitten deep into Dick's soul. "There'll be the deuce of a row about all the officers leaving the trench. Still, I'll tell Ircott to carry on."

"Oh, stay here yourself and be damned to you," cried Shannon furiously.

Dick turned to a corporal. "Tell Mr. Ircott what's happened," he said curtly and followed Shannon over the parapet."

It was a blind, stumbling journey, guided by whispered argument between the two men, who led them hopefully to one empty shell-hole after another, hinting after each failure that Trevannagh and his party must either have made good their escape or been captured by a hostile patrol. But Shannon would have none of it.

"If you haven't got the guts to come on, you can go back," he told them.

"You know we'd go anywhere for Captain Trevannagh, sir," said one of the men in an aggrieved whisper. "But I've lost me bearings, now. 'Arf a mo', sir, and let's try and find out where we are."

Twice Shannon drew hostile fire on the party by shouting Trevannagh's name and the men grumbled afresh.

"'E'll get us all done in, if 'e carries on like that," Dick heard one of them mutter, as they lay flat beneath a swarm of machine-gun bullets.

"Yus, 'e's arf dippy. Still, yer know what pals 'e was with the Captin. I ain't going back till we've found—something. Bob, I'm thinking we're too far to the right."

With the British soldier, sentiment is more cogent than discipline.

"That's the spirit," said Dick. "Come on."

For the first time in his war experience he felt no personal fear. Like Shannon, he was blinded by the one desire of reaching Trevannagh and failed to appreciate the ordinary dangers. His whole being was gripped by the terror of what they might find—or fail to find—and no nerves were left to record the normal emotions of physical fear. Vaguely he realized this indifference to danger as something unusual. . . .

A whisper hailed them from the darkness, followed by an exclamation from one of the men:

"Why, it's ole Barney. Wot cher, mate?"

Peering down, Dick recognized another survivor of the raiding-party. Almost insensible, he was crawling along like a dog with a broken leg, the instinct of self-preservation rising superior to pain. But it was manifest that he was near the end of his journey.

"Right foot gone to glory," he muttered dully.

"Two of you men carry him in," said Shannon. He

knelled down by the wounded man, who was in private life a schoolmaster and the company authority on map-reading, the use of the compass and astronomy—a kindly, inoffensive little man, if God ever made one.

“Swallow this,” he said, giving him a morphia tabloid. “Now get him on the stretcher as gently as you can. Easy does it?”

“Is that Mr. Shannon? You’ll be looking for the Captain, sir?”

“Yes, d’you know where he is?”

“He’s just over there, sir. Let’s see. Lost my bearings a bit, sir—shouldn’t have done it; it’s the wound, I suppose. Yes, just over there, sir—in a shell-hole—thirty yards—thirty bally miles by this method—loco-motion.” He sighed contentedly, as the drug began to take effect. “Yes, sir. Thirty yards, half left, you’ll find him. That’s east, boys, east by south. Pick up . . . Great Bear first.” He blinked helplessly at the starless sky. A rocket went up from the German lines. “Orion,” he proclaimed confidently.

A savage storm of fire forced them for a few seconds to lie flat and, when it had passed, they found that the little schoolmaster, hit again by a random bullet, had started upon another journey, wandering, it may be, among the stars that he had loved so well.

But Dick and Shannon hardly noticed this tragedy. Heedless of the German machine-gun, which, having reached the limit of its traverse, was sweeping back towards them, they ran forward in the indicated direction.

Dick’s foot caught in something: he stumbled and then fell sprawling into the soft chasm of a large shell-crater.

And there, sure enough, was Trevannagh. He lay on his back, motionless, but breathing feebly, and in his eyes, the only distinct feature of his face, there was a dumb, hopeless look—a look which Dick knew only too well.

At his side was the sergeant, dead, and another man was squirming about in the water at the bottom of the shell-hole.

“Duggie.”

“Is that you, Dick?” He spoke in a dull, feeble, even voice and the absence of the wonted drawl cut Dick like a knife.

“Yes. Here’s Julian, too. We’ve got a stretcher-party coming in a moment and we’ll get you in in no time.”

“Where are you, Julian?” He tried to turn his head to look at them, but he was too weak.

Shannon put a flask to his lips. “Where are you hit?”

“Stomach.” And then with a sudden, pitiful vehemence: “One of you two must get back to the trench at once and take over command. Why, there’s only young Ircott. Julian, you’d——” He gasped painfully for breath and, though his lips still moved, no sound came.

At this moment two of the men appeared with a stretcher.

“Where the devil are the rest of you?” asked Shannon.

“Bates and Wilson got hit, sir, and the other two are helping them in.”

“Quite right,” muttered Trevannagh. “Carry that chap in . . . can’t remember name . . . Sergeant White’s gone, I’m afraid.”

“Nonsense,” said Shannon. “We two’ll carry you in on the stretcher and they can help this poor chap along. Where’s he wounded?”

Dick, who had been doing what he could for the latter, looked up. “Groin, I’m afraid,” he said. “It’s Gardiner. I can’t stop the bleeding.”

The wounded man groaned. “For God’s sake get me out of this,” he sobbed. “Don’t leave me, boys.”

Trevannagh had another access of energy.

"Carry Gardiner in, you two men, and then come back for me."

The men hesitated, waiting for some sign from Dick or Shannon. But they, knowing Trevannagh, felt that it would be useless to try and get him to go first. He would only have struggled.

"Those are my orders," muttered Douglas, and almost reluctantly the men picked up their burden and vanished slowly into the darkness.

After they had gone there was a long silence, which Dick, fearing that speech might aggravate Trevannagh's condition, was unwilling to break. The night, which had at first been fine, had thickened and a light rain began to fall. After some wrestling with his equipment, Dick managed to disengage himself and, taking off his tunic, laid it over Trevannagh. The feeble "thanks, old man" alone showed that he was still conscious. Ever and anon lights sailed up from the German lines and were accompanied by bursts of rapid fire. It was evident that the enemy was particularly suspicious of their shell-hole, for he paid it special attention.

Trevannagh stirred slightly and groaned.

"Any pain, old man?" Dick whispered.

"No. Not much." A pause. "Afraid my number's up this time."

"Nonsense. Don't talk, Duggie."

A rocket lobbed gracefully over their heads, pitching near by and for a moment lighting the whole scene distinctly. It was a picture that Dick never forgot. The loose, damp earth of the shell-crater showed that it had been newly made and at the bottom shimmered the dark puddle which stirred fitfully as the rain greeted it; out of this six inches of water, the boot of the dead sergeant stuck grotesquely, and hunched above it the stiff figure, with the head bent upon the breast, seemed to be brooding over this strange phenomenon. It was horribly like a

comic drawing of a drunken man. Shielding Trevannagh as much as possible from the rain, crouched Shannon. With a sort of hopeless precision, he was trying to bandage the wound and staunch the bleeding, but as his efforts only drew a groan from Trevannagh, he stopped, wincing, and began to soothe him as a mother soothes a frightened child. But it was Trevannagh's face that ever after haunted Dick. Round the lips lurked a pitiful parody of his old smile and his blue eyes were wide open, dumb, unquestioning, expectant.

The thong of machine-gun fire whipped the air a foot above their heads and Dick helped Shannon to shift the wounded man under better cover.

In the silence that succeeded, Dick's weary mind drifted far away from the present. Other nights that the three of them had spent together crowded in upon his memory—moonlight picnics on the river at Oxford, surreptitious midnight coffee at Merricks, and, most distinct of all, that first, grand evening at Earl's Court after the Eton *v.* Harrow match. An Etonian had challenged Duggie to slide down the water-chute on the seat of his trousers and Duggie had taken the bet—and won. He recalled a genial commonplace of his father's: "You boys are really getting a bit too rowdy. I shall have to hire a mummy for dinner, like the Egyptians, just to put a damper on your spirits." Dick looked at the blurred figure of the dead sergeant and came back to reality with a shudder. Was this to be the end of it all?

And then Trevannagh was speaking again in that thin, colourless voice:

"It's no good. I'm finished. Poor little Dol! I suppose I've been a waster, but I was making good—making good—and we would have been so happy—all of us."

His voice strengthened for a moment and the familiar drawl returned. "Julian, you old blighter, d'you remember

that evening on board ship going to Algy . . . Algy, what's its name . . . you foretold all this about me and—my God—about yourself."

Thinking that he was delirious, Dick paid no heed to this, but Shannon whispered something in Trevannagh's ear and the latter murmured assent. A pause ensued.

"What on earth's happened to those stretcher-bearers?" said Dick. "They ought to have been back hours ago."

In his heart he knew that it was useless, that his friend was dying there alongside him in the darkness, but he dared not acknowledge it, even to himself. He tried to pray, but the only words that came were childish repetitions, mixed with a sort of expostulatory blasphemy. He was struck by the ultimate futility of religion—the religion in which he had been educated, its inapplicability to a crisis such as this. Miracles were the only true test of a religion. It was a miracle that was needed now, but they were buried between the covers of the Testaments, dead, useless.

At last his ear caught the sound of stealthy movement, and a moment later two dark shapes loomed above him.

"Lost the way agin, sir. Lot o' machine-gun fire about, too. How is the Captain, sir?"

Dick shrugged his shoulders.

"Mr. Shannon and I will carry him in, one of you had better show us the way."

As they were lifting Trevannagh on to the stretcher, he spoke again, and this time, so feebly that they had to bend close to him to catch the words:

"Dickie, you'll tell Dol all about this. Give her my love and tell her not to worry too much."

Even then it struck Dick as strange that he should confide these messages to him rather than to her brother.

"Of course, old chap. But you'll—you'll be able to tell her yourself soon."

Trevannagh thrust out his hands, helplessly, appealingly, and moved by a common impulse, his two friends gripped them in their own.

"I've had the best life and the best pals man ever had," he said, as one who makes his testament.

With infinite care they raised the stretcher.

"Comfortable, Duggie?"

There was no answer.

"Duggie?"

Still no reply.

"He's—he's only fainted," said Dick, pleadingly.

"Of course," snapped Shannon.

As they were lowering the stretcher into the trench, Ircott met them.

"How is the poor old chap? I'll fetch the doc.: he's just along in the next bay—got shelled out of his own shanty and the C.O. sent him up here." He laughed. "First appearance in the front line, I believe. Hullo, what the devil have you done with your tunics? Oh, I see, I'll send along to the dugout for your warms."

"Fetch the doc.," said Shannon curtly, as they laid their burden down upon the fire-step, and a moment later the doctor hurried round the traverse—a tactless, capable little man, with a great notion of his own self-importance and a wholesome disapproval of trench life. Shielding an electric torch elaborately with his hand, he switched it on so that the rays fell straight upon Trevannagh's face, still set in an invincible smile. For a moment Dick was struck by the resemblance to Von Ecke . . . One glance was sufficient.

"He's dead," said the doctor briefly. "Put your coats on, you two, or I shall be having you on my hands. They're no more good where they are."

Dazed, motionless, Dick seemed unable to grasp the

meaning of his words. Even though he had realized out there in the shell-hole that this must be the inevitable end, now that it had come, it seemed somehow impossible. That lonely vigil in the darkness had been just an isolated incident, a nightmare, which could have no connexion with the normal business of life. In every dream that he had dreamed, in every plan that he had fashioned, Douglas had had a share. And now all this fabric of the future came tumbling about his ears, stunning him. The voices of the men sounded blurred and indistinct:

“Bad night’s work for D Company.”

“That’s done it, that ’as. ’E was a bit of orl-right, the Captin.”

Mechanically Dick put on his tunic. Trevannagh’s batman was blubbering noisily and the sound irritated him. He felt supremely tired. He wanted to go away somewhere and think things out, but there was no privacy in these confounded trenches.

As he turned, one of the men stooped, picked something up and handed it to him. It was his revolver, which had fallen from the holster as he put on his tunic. Dick looked at it vaguely and then flung it petulantly into the mud, the bottom of the trench. The memory of how he had smashed his last toy the day he went to Harrow crossed his mind. That had been the symbol of discarded childhood, was this the end of his youth? His mind switched back to the present. What mad ideas came into one’s head, when one was tired! Could a revolver be a symbol of anything except death? Death! Though he had been staring, ever since the doctor had spoken, at that dark figure stretched upon the fire-step, it had somehow been out of focus. He had been looking further than that. . . . Now he realized. And suddenly he began to cry, with hard, choking sobs that shook his whole body. One of the men muttered a rude word of comfort and then

Shannon, calm and collected now that it was all over, put an arm round his shoulders.

“ Touch of shell-shock ? ” he heard the doctor whisper to Ircott.

The question seemed to pull Dick together.

“ Shell-shock be damned,” he said and strode off down the trench.

CHAPTER IV

IT was two days later that the great offensive was launched—two days of ceaseless bombardment which deafened one and stopped one from thinking. Dick went about his duties mechanically, his mind divided between grief and the fear and excitement of the coming battle. Shannon, who had taken over command of the company, had become very silent, even morose, speaking only of the attack, which he seemed to hail with a fierce eagerness. Of Trevannagh neither said much, fearing that he might upset the other's calm. And in this busy isolation the time crept on to zero-hour.

It is a popular fallacy that the job of the war-correspondent is to enlighten the public at home. But this is a purely subsidiary task. His true business is to let the troops know exactly what it is they have done. To the infantryman a modern battle is a queer jumble of impressions and emotions, which have no bearing upon the broader issues. His vision is often limited to a few square yards and his idea of how things are going to the fortunes of his own platoon. The spacious days of panoramic war are gone, but the pen remains mightier than the sword, and the war-correspondent, like the poor, is always with us.

Dick never achieved a coherent memory of the battle. Isolated incidents, mostly trivial, he could recall, but he was never able to marshal them in logical sequence. His clearest impression was that awful period of waiting before the signal to go over the top was given, but after that,

elementary emotions and instincts took charge of him, blurring his sense of order and proportion. It is not so much the tension of battle itself that sears a man's mind, it is the tremendous experience of anticipation.

The barrage had been timed to begin at six o'clock, while the attack was to be delivered half an hour later. At five-thirty, having inspected his platoon and found all in order, Dick went off to report to Shannon, whom he found in the company dugout at breakfast.

"Hullo, Dickie! Come and feed. Line your tummy with army bacon and you'll be bullet-proof. This bread, worn over the heart, should have life-saving properties too . . . there's quite a lot of tea in the rum." He pushed a mess-tin, full of some brown, steaming liquid, into his hand. "I'm feeling very offensive this morning. I wish I could find Beach Thomas and tell him all I'm going to do, so that he can get it right, when I've done it." He turned to his batman. "Have I got my field-dressing and a number nine in case of accidents? Good. Then gird me with the old family gas-mask!"

Dick stared at him in surprise. Gone was the hard, stricken expression, which he had worn since Trevannagh's death. Here was the old Shannon, gay, debonair, full of whims and extravagances. He hunted in his pocket and produced a collection of small ivory tools. "I must really polish my nails, if you'll excuse me, Dickie. I shall probably capture the Crown Prince in the course of the day and that's not the sort of thing one can do unmanicured."

Dick found his appetite poor. There was an odd, empty feeling in his stomach, which suggested hunger, but a difficulty in swallowing seemed to have developed. Undoubtedly he had a thirst and he slaked it generously with the concoction in the mess-tin. Pulses started throbbing wildly in unsuspected parts of his body and there was a shifty sensation about the eyes, which somehow, try as he might, wouldn't look at the same object for

more than a moment : just the same symptoms as he had had before those three attacks on the Somme. Altogether he felt damnably uncomfortable. Shannon watched him paternally.

"Go on, Dickie, make a decent meal. No need to stint yourself, my lad, you're not on leave now. Terrible thing to be in Blighty nowadays, going about with a bust flush of ration-cards. I heard of an old lady the other day, who was trying to combat the sugar shortage by re-reading Mrs. Barclay's novels."

Dick laughed. "I never could be hearty in the early morning."

"Well, come along and help me administer rum to the troops. Quarter to six : we'll just get it done before the noise starts."

After the warmth of the dugout, the morning air was chilly and Dick shivered.

"Cheer up, old chap," Shannon advised. "You *have* got 'blue-devils.'"

"I know. I feel beastly depressed. It's poor old Duggie, I suppose, and this show doesn't improve my *moral*."

"Don't think I've forgotten about Duggie," said Shannon, suddenly grave. "God knows I haven't. But to-day I feel—I'm not often broke for a word—but I can't quite describe how I feel. 'Carefree' is as near as I can get."

"I say, Julian, you remember one of the last things Duggie said, was that you'd foretold all about his death. I thought, at the time, that the poor old chap was wandering, but—did he mean anything?"

"Well . . ." Shannon hovered on the brink of confidence, but after looking into Dick's face for a moment, he thought better of it. "I don't know," he said shortly.

"You do, Julian."

"I don't, . . . Right, Sergeant-major, dish out the sacred fluid."

"The men want it too, sir. Lot of grouching about

being in the line four days and then having to go over the bags. Bad staff-work, they sez."

"I cordially agree with them. But we're coming right out to-night. . . . Gasper, Dick? No, not that one, if you don't mind." He indicated an elaborate-looking cigarette tipped with roseleaves, "You know I haven't smoked anything but straight-cut for years, but I've saved this one for to-day and I'm going to light it just as I go over the top."

As the last tot of rum was issued, half a dozen reports rang out, to be lost a second later in the continuous roar of the barrage.

"They're off," said Shannon, and then conversation became impossible.

Dick walked along to the section of trench where his own platoon was stationed. He wondered if the men were feeling as bad as he was and tried to distract his mind by studying their faces and actions. Good subject for an article, he thought; one might call it "An Analysis of Fear." But beyond noting dully what they were doing, his brain was too disorganized to grapple with the problem. A few—a very few, were sitting stolidly on the fire-step, waiting apparently without emotion for what the next half-hour might bring forth; others were pacing restlessly up and down with nervous, indecisive steps; others were maintaining their courage by shouting boasts in their friends' ears and explaining by gestures with their bayonets exactly what they were going to do to the Hun when they got over there. Others, again, were feverishly scribbling farewell letters and giving them to an R.A.M.C. orderly, who, by the irony of war, was blown to pieces a few seconds before the attack left the trenches.

Dick tried to distract his mind by writing a few lines to Lois, but he found his sentiment false, his language mawkish. Besides, it is infernally difficult to write legibly when one's hand is shaking. . . . After his third failure

he gave it up and his attention became riveted upon his wrist-watch. Try as he would, he could not keep his eyes from it. He attempted to count the seconds of a minute and then see how far out he was, but after twenty seconds, his eyes strayed back to the watch. It was the pivot of his world.

Six-twenty-five. The British were firing smoke-bombs, wrapping everything in fog, and the Germans in response put down a tremendous counter-barrage. Dick watched the minute-hand complete another round. He had an insane desire to clamber out of the trench, now, at once, and get the whole business over. His sergeant, an impeturbable old fellow, was trying to tell him something, apparently, from his expression, a joke, but Dick could not hear a word. He nodded in answer, not daring to risk a smile.

Six-twenty-eight now. He looked along the line and saw Shannon, twenty yards further down the trench, coolly light his cigarette and inhale with a smile of epicurean satisfaction. The men, fidgiting round the trench-ladders, were looking at him, waiting for the signal. He ticked off the seconds of the last minute like a coach starting a college eight. Then shouting something which no one could conceivably have heard, he scrambled on to the parapet and started running towards the German lines. He saw Shannon, still smoking serenely, wave to him. He broke into a walk and found his men quite a distance behind him. He passed the shell-hole, with the body of the dead sergeant still sitting in it, but the sight conveyed nothing to him. His last coherent impression was of Shannon, as he sauntered across No Man's Land, knocking the ash off his cigarette with a bayonet.

After that, all was confusion. Somehow he reached the Boche trenches, but he could not remember anything about getting through the wire entanglements. All sense of fear had left him and he was elated with a sort of drunken

frenzy. He plunged into the smoke screen, tripped over something and fell. For a second he thought that he must have been shot. He scrambled to his feet and found himself face to face with a German—a rat-faced, undersized fellow with a steel helmet hanging down over his ears. As Dick fired, the man threw up his hands in token of surrender and then sank on his knees, a dark smudge spreading outward from the heart. For a second, as he lay there squirming, Dick watched him, his mind strangely free from pity.

Then came another gap in his memory. There was a lot of shouting and the thud of bombs. Dick found himself alone in a section of trench and suddenly began to feel afraid. He hurried round the traverse to find himself confronted by three Germans. One of them fired at him point-blank and the bullet cut his shoulder-strap. The other two put up their hands. His sergeant, followed by several men, pushed past him. He heard the Germans yelling "Kamerad" and the grunt from the sergeant as he thrust his bayonet home. He laughed hysterically and then sat down on the fire-step feeling rather sick. The sergeant came up to him.

"You all right, sir?"

Dick nodded.

"I think that's about the last of them, sir."

"Eh?"

"They chucked their 'and in pretty quick, sir," said the sergeant in an aggrieved voice. "Still it wasn't so bad while it lasted."

Dick's mind began to grasp the situation. They had cleared the part of the German line allotted to them and the next thing to do was to get into touch with the troops on his flanks. The British barrage had lengthened and the German gunners, uncertain whether their infantry were still in possession of their trenches or not, continued to shell the old British front line. Dick's position, there-

fore, was for the moment a calm patch in the middle of the storm.

"Send a couple of men along each flank to find out what's happened there and let me know the result. Put the rest of the men on to consolidating the position and tell the section commanders to collect their sections and each take over a bit of Trench."

"Very good, sir."

"I want to find out about casualties, too. You go along this way and I'll go t'other," said Dick, and then with sudden irritation: "And for God's sake, wipe that bayonet of yours."

The sergeant stared at him and then, with a grim smile, rubbed the steel leisurely against his puttee.

Further along the line Dick found Ircott with his platoon.

"Good show, wasn't it?" said the latter. "Not heavy casualties either."

"I suppose it was all right. Have a cigarette," he held out his case and tried to light one himself, but found to his annoyance that his hand was trembling so much that he lit it half-way down. He laughed awkwardly.

The sergeant reappeared. "Can't get into touch with the people on our right, sir. But there don't seem to be any Fritzes about."

"No sign of Mr. Shannon?" asked Dick. He had forgotten all about Shannon.

"No, sir."

"Well, I'll send a report back to the Colonel about that."

He took out his trench-map and marked off their approximate position, adding a few notes about casualties and winding up with a demand for more bombs. He looked at his watch: twelve minutes past seven.

"By God, I'm hungry," he said with an air of discovery.

It was not until eight-thirty that the Germans delivered their first counter-attack—rather a feeble effort, which broke down under the British rifle-fire and never obtained

any sort of footing in the trenches. A Scottish battalion came up on Dick's right and took over some of the thinly-held line, but of Shannon and the rest of his company there was no sign.

Dick went to discuss the situation with the new arrivals and learnt from them that any further advance was held up owing to a strong redoubt on their right from which the Germans refused to be ejected. There was therefore nothing to do but to consolidate the position and await orders.

At a quarter to ten the Germans put down a heavy barrage on their old front line and a few minutes after the hour came the real counter-attack. The British gunners were engaged in shelling enemy transport at extreme range and had no time to waste over little things like counter-attacks, so that the Germans found practically no artillery opposition. The issue was never in doubt. Fighting doggedly, hopelessly, the British held up the enemy for a while, but short of bombs and without artillery support, they were in the end forced to retire and by eleven o'clock, save for a few isolated redoubts, which still held out, they were back in their old front line.

Of what happened Dick remembered very little. He seemed to be losing men fast. The attack on his immediate front had crumpled up, but the Germans had got in on either flank and were bombing their way along the trench. Dick found himself in a fire-bay with half a dozen of his men, who were stolidly exchanging shots with a party of Germans in a shell-hole. A rifle grenade lobbed over the traverse, detonated, and blew two of the men to pieces. The remainder stared stupidly at their comrades for a moment and then looked inquiringly at Dick.

"Can't do anything without bombs," said one of them. "Best thing to do is to get home, before the whole lot of us goes under."

Dick shrugged his shoulders helplessly. Another bomb

arrived, but failed to explode. However, it was sufficient to decide the men.

"Come on, boys. No good staying here, sir." And they clambered on to the parapet.

Dick knew they were right, but somehow he couldn't follow them. He knew also that he ought to order them to fight on, to shoot them with his revolver if they refused to obey, but he felt frightened, dizzy, helpless. They disappeared, and the fact of being left alone galvanized him into action. He hurried along the trench in the opposite direction to the German bombing squad. The next three bays were deserted, save for a few bodies, and then he came upon his sergeant, bandaging a shattered leg and cursing the remnant of his platoon, who were helping the wounded on to the parapet with a view to making tracks for home. Two of them were bending over the sergeant.

"Come along, sergeant, we'll carry you across."

"Damned if I'll quit without orders."

"But we're the last left, sergeant." Glancing up, the speaker saw Dick, "What about it, sir? It's Mr. Goodall, sergeant."

Again Dick shrugged his shoulders.

"If sergeant's not coming, he can blasted well stay where he is," muttered the other man and, without more ado, vanished over the parapet.

"The lieutenant and I will give ye a ride across," went on the first man coaxingly. He seemed to have taken command of the situation. "We can't be doing more good here and Fritz may be along any minute." He peered over the top to see if the road was clear and then suddenly collapsed with a crash, shot through the head by a stray bullet.

Dick stooped over the sergeant and wondered what the devil he ought to do. A few bays away, he saw the sun glint on a bayonet, carried high round a traverse: the

German bombing party were close at hand. He wanted immensely to do something heroic ; to pick up the sergeant and race across No Man's Land with him. But he was no hero. Also he realized that before he could lift him on to the parapet the Germans would have arrived. The whole thing must necessarily be futile, still it was damnable leaving him there. He hesitated, frightened, yet clinging desperately to the Code. And then near by he heard a voice shouting : " If any of you English swine value your lives come round the corner with your hands up."

But whether it was mercy or whether it was treachery that lurked round the traverse, Dick did not wait to learn. The spasm of courage passed and his whole soul was possessed by fear. With a shamefaced glance at his sergeant, who was jamming another clip of cartridges into his magazine and levering himself into a firing position, he clambered out of the trench and ran for his life.

Some special providence seemed to be watching over him. A shell burst a few yards away, bruising him all over with the chunks of earth which it threw up, but the splinters flew purring past without touching him. A "dud" missed him by a few feet and then, gasping for breath, he fell into the British trenches.

Here all was confusion. The fire-bays were packed with men : new troops, who had come up in support and been unable to advance, and the remnant of the attacking force, which had managed to find its way back. No one seemed to have any clear idea of what had happened and contradictory orders and rumours circulated freely. Dick elbowed his way along the trench until he found Ircott, who was nursing his right hand, from which two fingers were missing.

"Hullo," cried Dick, relieved at seeing one familiar face.

"Hullo. Look at this damn thing." He waved his bloody hand, from which the field-dressing had slipped down to the wrist. "I'll never be able to hold a bat again.

And I'd be playing for Surrey this summer, if it hadn't been for this blasted war."

"You'd better let me do that thing up properly. Seen Julian or the C.O. or anybody?"

"No. Poor old D Company seems to have been practically wiped out. There are about half a dozen of my chaps along there, and that's about the lot."

"Well, you stay here, old chap, and try and collect what remains of the company. Send a message along the trench each way and tell them to move along till they find you. Seems to be half the British army in this bit of line. I'll try and get hold of the C.O. and find out what's happening."

At the Battalion Head-quarters dugout he found the Colonel, striding up and down and using language about the High Command which, if overheard, would have ensured a court-martial. The adjutant, Hennessey's successor, appeared, at first gaze, to be stoically smoking his pipe, but the tears were running down his cheeks. At sight of Dick, the Colonel halted.

"Thank God, here's some one alive. What news, Goodall?"

"Bad, sir. There can't be more than seven or eight of my platoon left and Ircott, who's slightly wounded, says he can't muster more than half a dozen."

The Colonel nodded. "Tell me about it."

Dick gave him a brief undetailed account and the Colonel listened with a bitter smile on his face.

"It's the same story right the way through," he said, when Dick had finished. "The battalion, as a battalion, has ceased to exist. We went in over seven hundred strong and I doubt whether there are fifty of 'em left. God! We've been badly hit before, badly hit. We've had limbs broken, but the backbone was always intact. But now, everything's gone. Hardly an officer or an N.C.O. left. It's damnable." There was an awkward pause.

The Colonel was a reticent man and the habit of a lifetime is not easily broken. But here was a new judge to decide upon his indictment of the staff and the need for speech was too strong.

"Y'know A and B companies went over with you, Goodall? The right half of A got in all right after a bit of a tussle, but the left half of B found the Boche wire absolutely intact. Not a strand cut. I've told Brigade about it. I told Division only last night. I've told them five times in the last two days. And they asked me if we were afraid of a bit of wire: afraid of a bit of wire! They'd got other work for the artillery to do. The men—my men—cut that wire with their hands, with bombs and wire-cutters, and they were wiped out doing it. All for the lack of five minutes' sanity at headquarters. God! . . . I sent C up in support and, somehow, they managed to get in. And then came that first counter-attack. We smashed that up in fine style. After that I rang up Brigade for orders—whether to advance or not. They told me to wait. They were trying to get through to Corps and didn't like to act on their own responsibility. And there was that redoubt on your right that we couldn't get into. So they waited and lost their chance. . . . And then came that second counter-attack! I saw 'em massing for it and got straight through to Division and asked them to switch on every gun that would bear. And they told me again that the artillery was otherwise occupied—straffing enemy transport at eight thousand yards! They were swamped before they knew what had happened. A few of C got back, but not a soul from A as far as I know, and only three or four from B. Thirty or forty in all. . . . A damned little staff pup—red tabs and a riding-whip—was in here just now and saw Tennent." He glanced uneasily at the Adjutant. "And saw Tennent, and called him a sentimentalist—a sentimentalist! He hadn't been compelled to stay near a blasted telephone

while his men were shot down. . . . The crimson badge of shame, I heard a fellow call it the other day and, by God, it's a damned good name for it."

Ashamed of his outburst, he stopped abruptly. Dick had listened with impatience. There was a question that he wanted to ask, but the look on the Colonel's face had forbidden interruption.

"D'you know what's happened to Shannon, sir?"

The Colonel was a man who understood. Moreover, he was very fond of Shannon. His expression softened.

"I thought you knew, Goodall, or I'd have told you at once. Shannon is wounded, very badly indeed, I'm afraid."

"You mean——?"

"I'm afraid so. He may last a few days, the M.O. said, but—— I know, my boy, I know."

He laid a kind hand on Dick's shoulder. "He was a very brave man."

Dick bowed his head. Vaguely he accepted it as the fulfilment of some prophecy, though the sanction and the manner of the revelation was beyond his knowledge. Groping and peering into the darkness of spiritualism, Shannon had chanced upon some terrible light and, never doubting its authenticity, had shaped his life accordingly. Fragments of half-forgotten conversations thronged Dick's brain and cryptic phrases achieved a new significance. Though he had explained them away as the ramblings of a dying man, those strange words of Trevannagh's had haunted him. Now, dimly, distastefully, he understood.

"How did it happen?" he asked at length.

"I'll tell you later, Goodall. There's work to be done now. I've got orders to take what's left of us out, as soon as the shelling stops. As you may have noticed, the staff has got plenty of new troops to burn and they want the wreckage out of the way."

It was evening when the survivors of the battalion

tramped away from the line. It was a weary, beaten little troop. Not a man of them but had to mourn the loss of some friend, and they trudged along glumly, without talking. The Colonel sent back for Dick, who was marching in rear of the column.

"You wanted to hear about Shannon," he said. His voice was no longer bitter and he spoke as one brave man speaks of another, paying tribute of ungrudging admiration. "I wish I could do justice to the story. You saw him go over with the rest of the company—cool as a cucumber, as he always was. Your platoon and Ircott's got through all right, but the other half of D Company were held up by a strong-point, a sort of pill-box, it seemed to be, with a couple of machine-guns. As soon as Shannon saw what the trouble was, he got the men under some sort of cover—shell-holes, I suppose. Of course, I didn't see all this myself; I got the yarn from a sergeant. Then he took one section and worked round the flank of the pill-box. Apparently they broke into a bit of trench and bombed their way along towards it, but the whole party got knocked out, except Shannon and one man. And yet somehow—I can't tell you how—he took that pill-box, and when the rest of the company came up, they found him, desperately wounded, propped up against one of the machine-guns and trying to light a cigar, which he'd taken from one of the Boches he'd killed. Like him, that, wasn't it? He wouldn't be moved for some time, but when he fainted they brought him in. Terribly smashed, poor chap, terribly smashed. I expect the doctor's told you: may last a couple of days. . . . As brave a bit of work as has been done in this war. I'm sending his name in for an immediate award—recommending him for the V.C. Don't suppose it'll get further than Brigade: this battalion's not very popular at Head-quarters just at present. Anyway, he'd only have laughed at a decoration. . . . I know how you feel, Goodall: both your friends gone

within a few days. It hurts : it hurts damnably. But it was worth while having had such friends."

Dick nodded but said nothing. As he stepped aside and gradually slackened his pace to resume his position in rear of column, he overheard one of the men :

" . . . Fust the Captin an' now poor ole Dago . . . 'e's for it ; fair choked up wiv' lead. . . . 'E was a white man, 'e was, spite of his rummy ways. I bin wiv' 'im eighteen munfs now, an' I never see 'im get the wind up." He caught Dick's eye. " Meant nuthin disrespectful, sir," he muttered.

" I know," said Dick gently.

At the end of an eight-mile march, the platoon that had once been a battalion was picked up by motor-buses and transported to rail-head. Thereafter followed a jolting, interminable journey, which took them right out of the war zone, so that they might not contaminate the other troops, for the army has no use for derelicts. They were billeted in a little village, which seemed hardly to have heard of the war, there to nurse their wounds and to suffer an infusion of new blood.

The morning after their arrival the Colonel sent for Dick.

" The Adjutant's just had a note from Ircott," he said. " He wants some things out of his kit, if we could possibly send them along. He's in hospital about eight miles up the road and heard that we'd gone through. Shannon's there too, he says, still alive by some miracle. No, my boy," he added, noticing the look of hope in Dick's face. " I'm afraid he can't last long—may even be gone now, by what Ircott says. Well, there are plenty of lorries running through here, and I thought you might like to take Ircott's kit along. You're sure to get some sort of a lift. Here's a list of what he wants. Tell 'em both——" But the Colonel was an inarticulate sort of fellow and no hand at sending appropriate messages. He broke off and nodded kindly.

Through the good offices of an A.S.C. corporal, Dick found himself, an hour later, rattling down the long straight road in a motor-lorry, but unluckily, after some four miles the lorry halted at a dump and he had to finish the journey on foot.

Having explained his errand to an orderly, he was shown into an ante-room, where presently one of the sisters came to him. She was a weary young woman, with a calm, gentle face, instinct with a sympathy, which she strove professionally to repress, but which constantly broke through her reserve.

"We don't usually have visitors here," she said. "But matron's out and I don't see what harm it could do. You want to see Lieutenant Shannon? The poor boy!"

"Is he——?"

"No, he's alive yet, but hardly conscious. Doctor says it's strange he's not gone, but I'm afraid he's sinking now. . . . He's dreadfully smashed. It's a wonderful constitution he must have."

"I'd like to see him: he's my best friend, you know."

At the pain in his voice the girl looked up.

"Is your name 'Dick' by any chance?"

Dick nodded, not caring to trust his voice.

"He's been asking for you," she said, laying a timid hand on his arm. "In there."

It was a small dark room with only three beds in it. The first was empty and on the second lay something covered over with a sheet. For a moment Dick paused, wondering fearfully whether the sister had not made a mistake yet unable to make sure by raising the sheet. He stood there, trembling, and the sweat crawled down his forehead. And then in the corner he saw Shannon—Shannon, deathly pale, but, at first gaze, otherwise unchanged, his face smoothly shaven and the sleek, dark hair brushed back over his head. Reassured, Dick fetched a chair and sat down by the bed.

With eyes half-closed, Shannon was wandering in that No Man's Land that lies between Life and Death, but even there Dick's presence seemed to reach him and to guide the tired spirit back. The old, quizzical smile creased the bloodless lips and he opened his eyes. Dick saw them clear and intelligent.

"Hullo, Dickie," he said weakly, "I thought you'd come, somehow. Young Ircott told me he'd sent a note, so I made him find some one to play barber in order to receive you in state. Couldn't do it himself: he's lost some fingers, you know. However he managed to dig up some one. . . . I'd hate you to remember me with a bristly face and my hair drooping dankly over my eyes."

Dick attempted an answering smile, but his lips refused to obey. This half-deprecating anxiety about his appearance was so characteristic of Shannon, the Shannon whom he knew and loved—a personality somehow distinct from the broken, crumpled body beneath the tightly-drawn quilt.

"Don't, Julian."

"You mustn't thwart me, Dickie. That's what the M.O. said to young Ircott, when he tried to get out of barbering me. Expectant mothers and dying men are always allowed to have their own way." As his voice grew stronger, all the old affectations and tricks of speech returned: he stroked his hair caressingly—a favourite gesture.

"Any pain, old chap?"

"Not much—I'm pretty well numb. And the Doc. for a Scot, is very generous with the morphia."

For the only time in their friendship, Dick found a difficulty in talking to Shannon.

"You're not as bad as you think, Julian," he hazarded. "I expect you're out of the war for good, but you'll be about again one of these days."

"No, I'm dying," said Shannon quickly and without

that pathetic hope of contradiction in his voice which turns the statement into a question.

Dick was silent. He felt that trite assurances and hackneyed optimism would be an insult in face of this fearless knowledge. Shannon, reading his thoughts, smiled.

"All right, old man : you needn't say it. You'd never get the right note of conviction into your voice. I've got to go, and I'll die as I've lived, with a jest on my lips and a laugh in my heart. If I can't die in harness, I'll die in motley." He seemed to think that he had struck too serious a note, for he immediately added, "What sort of a deathbed scene shall I give you, Dickie ? Lyceum melodrama—Death, the grim sergeant-major ordering the great roll-call and all that sort of tosh ? . . . Forgive me, Dickie, I'm behaving like a cad." His voice trailed away into a whisper.

"Don't talk, Julian : it tires you. I'll tell you what's happened to the battalion if you like, but it's not pleasant hearing." He told the story and Shannon listened with attention. At the long list of killed, he smiled sadly.

"Poor chaps," he muttered, when Dick had concluded. "As good a set of fellows as one could wish to meet—and I shall meet 'em soon. . . . I ought to have been draft-conducting officer to that lot over to the other side, but I seem to be following on by special train. . . . Yes, Dickie, as you were thinking. Death's very rich in metaphors. . . ." A paroxysm of pain twisted his mouth, but the eyes smiled up at Dick—clear and undaunted. The spasm passed.

"By Jove, Julian, I'm forgetting a great bit of news," cried Dick, surprised that it had slipped his mind. "The C.O. has put your name in for the V.C."

Shannon frowned.

"Damn lot of good when you haven't got a chest to hang it on : besides, I don't deserve it . . . and the brave

gentlemen on the staff aren't likely to forward it. . . . Still, it might help the guv'nor and Dol. . . . It's hard for Dol : by God, it's hard—and for you, old chap."

A long silence followed. Seemingly exhausted, Shannon closed his eyes and Dick dared not disturb him. Twilight crept into the room, staining the floor and the walls with deep shadows, but for Dick, time had stopped and his universe had dwindled to that narrow ward. No thought of moving entered his mind, as he sat there in the dim silence, broken occasionally by visitors from the outer world. At intervals the sister looked in, nodded consolingly and went away. Four orderlies entered and took away the thing on the bed, handling it with a clumsy reverence that custom had not altogether destroyed. To these things Shannon seemed oblivious, but when the stillness was broken by the sound of a Portugese soldier singing outside, he stirred slightly and opened his eyes.

" Funny thing," he said, " one can't understand a word he's singing and yet one knows somehow that it's a love song. Music is the true Esperanto." This remark seemed to please him, for he repeated it. " Music is the true Esperanto."

" Feeling more comfortable, Julian ? "

" Yes, I'd like a smoke, only it makes me cough and that hurts. It's very dark, Dickie, or is it because—— ? "

" No, no, you've been asleep, old man, and it's getting late : half-past five ! I've been here nearly two hours."

" Don't go. Sister's a friend of mine and she won't mind you being here."

" I shan't move till I'm thrown out."

An orderly came in with a lamp, which he placed on a locker beside them ; but it only lit the immediate circle round the bed, leaving the rest of the room in shadow.

" Doctor 'll be round in a minute, sir," said the man. " In the big ward now, 'e is."

"Keeps this mortuary to the last—good old morphia merchant."

After this he was silent for a long time and Dick thought that he had fallen asleep again, but suddenly the dying man moved excitedly.

"Duggie," he cried in a voice of surprised greeting, "Duggie!"

Dick looked at him in fear and discomfort. Surely this must be delirium! But the eyes, which seemed to be gazing at something past him, were the eyes of a sane man.

"Can't you see him, Dick? He's still there—only fainter, somehow." Involuntarily Dick looked over his shoulder into the empty shadows. He shook his head.

"But I tell you he's there, man. He's waiting for me. . . . Then it's true: it's all true! I always believed, but now I know. I shan't keep you waiting long, Duggie." And then in a lower voice: "Sorry, Dick, I'm getting morbid again. Comes of living all wrong and dabbling in spiritualism." His voice died away to a whisper. "I've lived artistically and now I'm trying to die artistically . . . mere bric-à-brac. . . . That's where I've made my mistake. One must do natural things, naturally. Death is the triumph of Nature over Art."

A gust of pain caught him, puckering his face, and at the same moment the doctor entered, accompanied by the sister-in-charge. He had a hypodermic syringe in his hand, and at once injected a full dose of morphia.

"There ye are, laddie. I had it a' ready for ye. After a meenit, ye'll be feeling no more pain."

"Mors janua vitæ," murmured Shannon between his groans. "But . . . mind the step."

For the first time the Doctor noticed Dick.

"And who's yon——" he began.

"My friend," said Shannon. "I want him."

"Eh, I'm no sayin' he shouldna be here."

The drug began to take effect, smoothing out the wrinkles that pain had wrought.

"Tha's good," said Shannon thickly, "tha's good. I'm going under, an' I shan' wake. Bless you, Dickie!"

He rallied his strength for a final epigram.

"Don't look so glum, old chap. Death's only an *entr'acte* between two scenes in a farce, but you can only see the second act from the other side of the curtain." He was silent for a moment and then began to mutter incoherently. "God! . . . damn tired . . . so long . . . coming, old man, coming. . . ." And then, loudly, "Laugh, Dickie, laugh!"

This effort seemed to drain away his last reserves of energy and then morphia, taking control, guided him into the dark haven of unconsciousness. His breathing became even but more feeble, the dark eyes closed wearily, the lips relaxed, intelligence seemed to have been wiped away from his face, leaving it a mask. There was silence for a minute while the doctor examined him. He shook his head.

"He was reet, poor laddie. He'll no wake again, but jus' slip awa' peacefully in his sleep. A brave mon—an' a verra remarkable case."

He turned to Dick and was about to offer him the civility of a drink, when the sister, with quicker sympathy, drew him aside. The doctor nodded and the two walked softly out of the room, leaving Dick alone with his friend.

For a moment he watched him with a curious feeling of detachment, too tired in body and mind to feel supreme emotion. Vaguely he wanted to get away from the ward, from this mocking caricature of his friend, but he had no power to move. He found to his surprise that he was weeping, and, through the dim vision of his tears, Shannon's face seemed to be smiling cynically up at him. This effect hurt him and he turned the lamp away so that the bed might be in shadow.

He noticed that Shannon's right hand lay outside the

coverlet, and lifting the unresponsive fingers, he moved it beneath the bed-clothes. With the contact came full realization. Brokenly, bitterly he sobbed with a sense of futility and injustice.

"Oh, God," he cried, "I can't bear this. It's not fair to make me bear it. It's not fair. It's not fair."

The fit passed, leaving him calm but with despair in his heart. Kneeling down, he kissed the dying man on the forehead.

"Good-bye, Julian," he said.

But the lips, shaking with each breath, were silent.

"Good-bye, Julian," said Dick again and walked rather unsteadily out of the ward.

In the ante-room he found the sister writing up notes of her cases. With the tact born of a long intimacy with sorrow, she did not look up as he entered but kept her eyes on the papers.

"I can't stay there any longer," said Dick. "I can't sit there watching him. And yet I don't want to go until—until it's all over. Strictly speaking, I suppose, I oughtn't to be here, but you'll let me stay, sister?"

"Yes, you can stay a bit longer, if you wish. But, may be, your own battalion will be wanting you."

"No, there's nobody left and nothing to do. The Colonel knows: he'll understand."

The sister became practical. "It's nearly seven o'clock, and you'll want some dinner, but you won't care about a mess full of strangers. There was that Lieutenant Ircott in your regiment here this morning—you brought some kit for him, didn't you? But he went down to the base just before you came, so I doubt if there's anyone here you know."

"Oh, I don't want any food," said Dick.

For the first time the sister looked up from her papers.

"Nonsense," she said sharply. "One of the night

orderlies will be in there looking after Lieutenant Shannon and he can bring you something in here."

"You're very kind, but I don't want anything," Dick repeated wearily. "I'll just stay here, if I may, till—till he goes. And then I'll get back—somehow. I don't want to see him again. I'd hate to remember him as he is now, but I can't leave until I know. Please don't bother about me: just leave me alone."

The sister nodded and went on with her work, while Dick stared out of the window at the new cases being carried in on stretchers. Finally she rose.

"When does the doctor expect——?" asked Dick.

"It's hard to say—almost impossible, but within the next three or four hours." With a motherly gesture, she laid her hand on his shoulder. "I understand," she said, and walked quickly out of the room.

But it was not until after midnight that Shannon went to seek Trevannagh in the darkness, and for all those hours Dick waited in the stuffy little room, waited now in dull despair, now in passionate protest, but always with a mind mercifully innocent of hope. From time to time one of the night-sisters would come in, stare at him wonderingly, and then go about her work, but Dick scarcely noticed.

And then, at last, he heard the orderly leave the ward and come along the passage towards the room. As the man entered, Dick rose instinctively, as though to receive the blow standing.

"E's gorn, sir," said the man heavily. There was a lack of sympathy in his voice, an inability to appreciate the presence of tragedy, which cut Dick like a whip. But it also helped him. Had the man been more dramatic, more reverential, Dick would have altogether broken down, but the flat, unemotional tone invested the message with a commonplace quality, demanding a commonplace acceptance.

Dick nodded.

"Perhaps you'd like to see 'im . . . ?"

"No," said Dick. "No. I think I'll go now. Tell the doctor and thank him for his kindness." He hesitated, and then with a weary gesture gathered up his cap and stick and walked slowly out of the hospital.

Fine earlier, the night had thickened and the inevitable drizzle was falling. The poplars which lined the road swayed and creaked, fantastically changing shape and colour as the wind moved them, but they were at best a ghoulish, indistinct chorus, lacking individuality. The white road stretched unwaveringly to the limit of his vision—something solid and essential in this world of ghosts—and it was the bite of his feet on the metal, as he plodded heavily on, that told him that this was no nightmare, but sober fact. From time to time motor lorries lumbered by on their way up to the line, but they seemed somehow relentless and inhuman—more apiece with this land of shadows than with the normal business of life. He was oppressed by an intolerable sense of loneliness, and though sometimes for a moment his weary mind forgot the cause, the feeling of isolation remained. And then the full measure of the tragedy would come back to him, wringing his heart with its blind and senseless injustice. The murder of his parents and the loss of Trevannagh and Shannon became linked in his mind with the fate of Von Ecke, and he strove to find some meaning, some concerted and intelligent scheme behind it all. But the whole thing seemed wanton and purposeless. Passionately he cursed the system that had caused the war, and the old men who, lurking at home behind their decorative evasions, had sent his comrades to their death, and the God who suffered it all and made no sign.

On Lois his mind dwelt with a great tenderness, clutching hungrily at the thought of her as of something stable in a crumbling world. She had loved them all, she would understand, would comfort him. But could she ever make

up to him what he had lost ? Could she achieve that fine, satisfying comradeship which Shannon and Trevannagh had given him ? In his heart he knew her to be incapable of this. Few women can offer real friendship to a man and Lois was not of their number. But he told himself that her love and sympathy would in time heal the wound, and found some comfort in the lie.

And then came a different phase. Worn-out, half-asleep, he stumbled on, too tired now to analyse the present or to plot the future. Nothing mattered, nothing was real, save the long white road with its swaying poplars. And suddenly the feeling came to him that he was not alone. It seemed to him that his two dead friends, one at either hand, were keeping pace with him, silent yet comforting, and even while he recognized it as a trick of his tired brain, the feeling was too strong to be thrown aside. A strange peace took possession of him, a peace of weariness and illusion.

As he entered the little town, he looked back and saw the eastern sky aglow with the dawn. With the light, his reason re-asserted itself. The comfort of an unseen presence faded with the shadows whence it had come. He turned to the west again and walked slowly into the village. There was no light there.

CHAPTER V

IT was not till nearly two months later that the regiment returned to the line. The mass of new recruits, scarcely leavened by the few survivors of the battle, formed, indeed, a battalion, but the traditions had died with their authors and the new body refused to harbour the old soul. The quality of both officers and men had deteriorated. The latter were mainly conscripts with a mouthful of complaints and no stomach for fighting, while the former were too much in sympathy with them and too near them in class to inspire respect or discipline.

Transferred from his old company, Dick found himself placed in command of A Company with three subalterns, who were characterized by a profound distaste for danger, and who, judging by their conversation, had devoted their lives to ruining shopgirls. With these as corner-stones, it was a disheartening job to attempt to build up a company, but, working with infinite perseverance yet with no pride nor interest in the achievement, Dick did succeed in producing order where chaos had previously existed.

With no congenial spirit, he lived silently in the past, and the new officers wove round him a tale of unrequited love (with, of course, the inevitable shopgirl as the other protagonist), which was supposed to have permanently embittered him. That the loss of his two friends was reponsible for his moroseness was, for them, altogether too fantastic a theory. The ideal of friendship was a thing undreamt of in their philosophy ; a pal was a pal as long

as he paid for his round of drinks and left one's women alone; and with this as their conception of the whole duty of man, they naturally found but little in common with Dick.

Rumours of another big battle were current when the battalion moved up to take its place in the trenches, and though Dick told himself that he no longer cared what happened to him, with the first grumble of the guns all the old discomfort returned. However, they reached the line to find, to their relief, that the offensive had broken out further north, and so they settled down to the routine of trench life with its general boredom and its occasional alarms. It was during one of the latter interruptions that Dick's turn came. The morning had passed peacefully, but after lunch the German gunners decided to indulge in a little practice and selected Dick's sector of trench as their target. Though at first their shooting was rather wild, they soon began to pick up to the range and to make things thoroughly unpleasant for A Company. There were a few slight casualties and then a fire-bay was blown in, burying a couple of men and wounding several more. Hurrying along to the spot, Dick superintended the job of digging them out and, having despatched them to the dressing station, strolled round the next traverse, where he found one of his sergeants, a stolid, fearless old fellow and a great friend of his, instructing some of the new hands in correct deportment under shell-fire.

"It's no good ducking yer ruddy 'eads," he was saying. "You just got to grin and think of Blighty. An' above all, don't fidget, unless yer got lice, because that seems some'ow to attract the shells." A crump, bursting near by, gave point to this theory.

"That was rather a rude one, sergeant," said Dick.

"Yes, sir, they're getting matey—that's what they are, getting matey."

Dick sat down on the fire-step and lit a cigarette. There

came a familiar roar of a big shell—a sound like a train rushing into a tube station.

“’Ere she comes,” yelled the sergeant. “Don’t take no notice of ’er, boys.”

There came a terrific explosion, the parapet of the trench collapsed and the earth rattled down all round them. With the concussion, every one had shut their eyes, and as the smoke and dust cleared away, the sergeant looked round to number his flock.

“’Ere we are, you see; all merry an’ bright. . . . ‘Ullo, sir, are you hurt?’”

“My leg,” moaned Dick. “Oh, Christ, my leg.”

Thereafter his recollection of things became blurred. Feeling seemed to die out of the rest of his body and to concentrate in his right leg, which throbbed with intolerable pain. He heard a deafening chorus of voices shouting “Stretcher-bearers. Stretcher-bearers at the double. Captain’s hit.” The idea came to him that he must be dying, and he was surprised to find that he was undismayed, even apathetic about it all. Anything would be better than this pain, which seemed to be flowing back from his leg and racking his whole body, making him catch his breath and turning his groans into hiccoughs. He saw a crowd of faces stooping over him with a sort of expectant interest. Then the outlines became indistinct and smudged with purple. The purple blotted out everything and pain and consciousness ebbed away.

After this he caught only occasional glimpses of the world, and then through pain-distorted lenses. He came round when he was being examined at the dressing-station, when, after tenderly bandaging him, the doctor touched some nerve or other, and when Dick screamed with pain, said “Ah!” upon a note of pleased recognition, as though he would have been disappointed if nothing had happened. Dick cursed him extensively and was rewarded with a dose of morphia, which carried him back into that kaleido-

scopic haze of unconsciousness. He awakened again in an ambulance, which jolted him abominably, making him cry with a sort of childish anguish. Dimly he remembered being carried into a hospital, where a nurse assured him, but without conviction, that he would be feeling better presently. His nerves were too dulled to feel much pain, and, as they put him to bed, he looked with puzzled interest at the queer, bandaged thing that had once been his leg. The sister was kind and sympathetic and held him up in her arms while the orderlies were arranging a "cage" so that the bedclothes might not press upon his leg. She held him comfortably, tenderly, his head resting upon her bosom, and Dick, from thinking merely that she must be beautiful, came to the conclusion that it was Lois—much older, of course, but then everything had happened such years ago. It was all very perplexing. . . .

She lowered him into the cool warmth of the sheets and he sighed contentedly.

"I'm so tired, Lois, old girl," he muttered. And the sister, who only that morning had been "Eileen" to a dying boy, smiled wisely. At such moments the hospital nurse is every man's only woman.

There followed a fortnight, divided in Dick's mind into days of agony, days of pain and days of discomfort, and then he was moved to another hospital at the base—a splendid affair, with titled kitchen-maids and a scandalous but thoroughly undeserved reputation. It is a popular superstition that the same head cannot wear both a coronet and a halo.

Here Dick stayed for a month, while the doctors wrangled among themselves as to whether he should be allowed to keep his leg. To his distorted mind, the whole hospital seemed divided into two camps, one faction alleging gangrene and demanding his leg, and the other advocating a policy of wait and see. And damning them all impartially, Dick groaned his way through it.

It may have been that the commandant had received certain news and had decided that it would act as some sort of compensation, or it may have been pure coincidence, but it so happened that upon the same day that they resolved to amputate, a notice appeared in the *London Gazette* to the effect that Dick had been awarded the Military Cross for gallantry during the big offensive two months earlier. Another announcement informed the world that the brigade-major who had sent Trevannagh to his death had been given the D.S.O. Of Shannon there was no mention.

The ideas of amputation and decoration jostled one another in Dick's mind until he was quite bewildered; but when the prettiest V.A.D. in the hospital came to congratulate him, and, sitting down on the bed, jarred his leg unmercifully, he became reconciled to his fate. Soon there would be no more pain.

"I think I'd like to write a letter before this butcher-business begins, please, nurse."

"To that girl in England, I suppose?" she inquired archly.

"Yes. She'll be as cut up as—I'm going to be, but I suppose she's got to be told."

"I don't think you ought to write now. You've just had that composing injection, and if you start scribbling, it won't work. Suppose you tell me what to say and I'll write for you."

"Thanks. That's very good of you."

"Well, is it Lois or Babette or—Oh, I forget the other names." She had been on night-duty and could have blackmailed half the ward.

"Now then, nurse," said Dick, blushing.

"Oh, I've remembered some more. Perhaps it's that little midinette—er—Julienne?"

"No," he said shortly, but the girl did not notice the change in his voice.

"Well, here's some paper and a pen and here am I, your obedient stenographer."

Dick racked his brains for the appropriate way of breaking the news. It must be something brave and flippant, something that Shannon would have written under similar circumstances.

"My dear Lois," he dictated. "It's splendid of you to write so often. I get a letter nearly every day, and I am pleased to see that your spelling is improving. In answer to your eternal query as to how my leg is going on, I can now answer briefly but satisfactorily. It's not going on at all, in fact, it is going off this morning." He paused. "That's all. Just sign it 'Dick,' please."

"But aren't you going to say a word about the M.C.?"

"Oh, she'll see that in the paper. . . . Lord, I wish it was all over." The tragedy of the thing smote him. "I'll never be able to play any games again. I'll always be just a useless ullage. I suppose I ought to release her from her engagement, but I can't do it just now."

"As if any girl wouldn't be proud——" began the V.A.D.

"Because I've won the M.C.?" The picture of his old sergeant, lying wounded in the German trenches and waiting for the bombing party to come round the traverse, rose before his eyes, and he winced. "I don't deserve it. God knows, I don't deserve it. . . ."

To be given an anæsthetic is always a queer experience. There is none of that soothing and gradual loss of consciousness which makes the taking of morphia and kindred drugs so pleasant. It is a battle royal with oblivion until the very last moment.

Like every one who has ever had chloroform administered to him, Dick was at first obsessed by the idea that they would start the operation before he was properly "under," for his mind seemed to shake off the effects of the composing dose and to become extraordinarily alert.

"Don't touch me yet," he shouted, "I'm not off, you know."

"All right, my son, we'll see to that."

The sweet, sickly, overpowering smell of the chloroform oppressed his lungs, but try as he would he could not rid himself of that feeling of wakefulness.

"Turn some more on ; you'll never get me under this way." He heard a laugh and the intoxicating smell became stronger.

"Quite sure ? How are you feeling now ?"

To his surprise, Dick found a difficulty in answering. His voice sounded thick and drunken.

"All ri'. I'm nor gone. Don' star' yet."

There was another laugh, and Dick attempted to speak again, but the power had left him. The struggle had suddenly taken on a different phase. He was no longer trying to subjugate his mind to the anæsthetic : he was fighting desperately for consciousness. He shouted and the noise seemed to come from a distance, as though his lungs and diaphragm were choked and the sound could hardly find its way through. He seemed to be spinning round and round—faster and faster ; he clutched hold of the side of the table, but there was no stability anywhere ; he was dumb, paralysed, helpless. And then everything faded away.

It was evening when he again became fully conscious, and though he could remember no details, he knew that he had passed the day in the company of Shannon and Trevannagh.

One of the sisters was sitting by his bedside and asked him how he felt. He shook his head feebly.

"Don't pretend you can't talk, Captain Goodall," she said, smiling. "Why, you've been chattering away all day."

"Have I ?" What have I been saying ?"

"All sorts of things. You've been having a tremendous

argument with two friends of yours, asking all sorts of funny questions about how they were getting on, and you seemed so surprised, just as though they were answering you and you could hardly believe their answers."

"D'you remember their names?"

"I should think I do, they came in about every other minute. Julian and Duggie."

Dick nodded. His brain was too tired properly to explore the matter, and the leg that wasn't there began to hurt him.

"That's funny. . . . I think I'll try and get to sleep again."

Having had the offending leg removed, Dick felt entitled to a speedy recovery, but a mild form of blood poisoning set in, and it was a long time before he was reported upon as fit to be sent to a hospital in England. Though the delay chafed him, it was not without its bright side, for it allowed Lady Kinthorpe to interview one of the minor gods in the medical department of the War Office, and get Dick earmarked for her own hospital. She had written to him as soon as his name had appeared in the casualty list—a brave, affectionate letter, the first that he had had from her since Trevannagh's death—and she wrote again to congratulate him upon his decoration, mentioning at the same time that she hoped to arrange things so that he should be sent to Poldene.

"Dolores, poor child, is here with me," she wrote. "She sends her love, but says she cannot write just yet. We are both looking forward to seeing you here. We survivors among all this wreckage must cling together."

Lois wrote to him almost daily, treating the loss of his leg in the same careless way that she treated everything, and jumbling sympathy, news and complaint into a dozen ungrammatical lines. One example suffices.

"Dearest Dickiebird, I can't get over your getting the M.C., which I'm fearfully proud about. Come back soon.

I want to show you to all my friends and tell them you're my fiancé. I've just been selling flags all day, dinkie little things with pink rosettes on the top, and I'm fearfully done, so please excuse short letter. I'm frightfully sorry about your poor old leg, I shall only have one knee to sit on now, but I've grown so fearfully thin on these war-rations, that I expect it will support me all right. I've just had a tremendous row with mother about lunching with an officer to-day—such a dear, who saw I was almost fainting from selling flags, and took me to the Ritz. Mother says it's not fair on you, but you don't mind, old thing, do you? Don't flirt with any V.A.D.'s Dickie, because they're very dangerous, and I'm fearfully jealous of you now you're a one-legged hero. Oh, Richard, *O mon roi*, I do love you, so be good. Your very weary Lois."

They were all in the same strain, and Dick, infatuated though he was, searched in vain for any depth of feeling or comprehension. He told himself that she was trying to cheer him up, by refraining from any show of emotion, but the pettiness of her outlook and interests was manifest, and from the fact that she never mentioned Shannon or Trevannagh, apart from an initial letter of condolence, Dick was forced to realize that there lay no sympathy between them upon that score. Nevertheless he clung to her as to the one thing that really mattered to him in this changed world, and though intellectually she might not be satisfying, the memory of her graceful indolence and lazy passion gratified all that was physical in him.

In the early spring of 1918 Dick was pronounced fit enough to be moved to England, and Lady Kinthorpe, having pulled many wires and broken much red-tape, managed to get him sent to Poldene.

He found her greatly altered. Gone was the brilliant society-woman, and in her place a faded, gentle lady, who went about her work with a sort of hopeless efficiency. But if there was a change in her, the war had wrought an

even greater one in Dolores Shannon. She had once described herself as one who preferred floating on the surface and playing with the foam, to diving into deep water to look for pearls, and Dick remembered her chiefly as a flirt, rather of the same type as Lois, only cleverer and more subtle. That girl, with her epigrams and her jejeune laughter, had died, killed by two names in a casualty list, and here was a quiet, capable young woman, serene, sexless. The whole Hospital worshipped her, an adoration which, a year ago, she had enjoyed to the full, but of which she now seemed wholly unmindful. Both were frankly delighted to see Dick, and both kissed him without hesitation.

"You see, you're just like a son to me," explained Lady Kinthorpe.

"And just like a brother to me," Dolores added.

"Yes," said Dick. "The three of us must stick together, and your father, Dol, and Lord Kinthorpe, of course. We stand for so much to each other, now."

"And Lois?" queried Dolores.

"And Lois, of course."

The hospital was not very full just then and Dick was given a small room to himself. There on the evening of his arrival the two women came to have that inevitable talk, which he had half looked forward to and half dreaded.

"Please tell us everything about Douglas and Julian, Dick," said Lady Kinthorpe. "I couldn't bear to hear it from anyone but you. Don't spare us any details. We have a right to know." And so Dick told them the whole story without reservation or comment, while the two women, with their arms round each other, wept quietly.

"I suppose I ought to be proud," said Lady Kinthorpe, when he had finished. "I ought to thank God for having had such a son and to find comfort in the fact that he died for his country. But I can't—I can't. I'd rather England should lose the war and that I should have my son back."

Dick sought for some word of comfort. "In time, perhaps . . ."

"A mother's love is not measured by time," said Lady Kinthorpe.

At Poldene the days slipped by pleasantly and peacefully. In that little room, with its chintzes and its flowered wall-paper, the war seemed very remote, and the arrival of the *Daily Mail*, with its thickly-typed war news, a graceless intrusion.

With her usual kindness Lady Kinthorpe had written to Mrs. Effingham asking her and Lois to spend a week-end at Poldene and see that Dick was being properly looked after. Accordingly, after several cancelled acceptances, they wired to say they were coming, choosing a particularly inconvenient time, when the Hospital was trying to grapple with the casualties from the new German offensive.

Though she had heard much about Lois, Lady Kinthorpe had never met her, and was not a little intrigued to see what manner of girl Dick had chosen. The result was something of a shock to her. Too shrewd to be taken in either by the mother or the daughter, she was too fond of Dick to breathe a word of her doubts to anyone except Dolores. To her it was obvious that Mrs. Effingham regarded Dick as something of a "catch," for on his parent's death he had inherited a considerable amount of money. Lois herself she summed up as a feather-brained little flirt, passionate but fickle. There was no assurance here of happiness for Dick.

It needed more than a mere European War to change Mrs. Effingham. International rumour had replaced suburban scandal as her main topic, but her authoritative manner of discussion remained, and in the gentle art of snubbing she was more formidable than ever.

"I'm sure it's very good of you to ask us down," she said to Lady Kinthorpe with the air of a boxer shaking hands before a fight.

"I'm delighted that you could come and Dick is almost delirious with excitement."

"It's very pretty down here," went on the visitor, patronizingly, as though comparing Poldene unfavourably with Putney Common. "And I expect it's nice and quiet."

"Oh, yes."

"No air-raids," snapped Mrs. Effingham as though Lady Kinthorpe had fled from London to avoid them. And that was the end of the first round.

Dick had not seen Lois since he had first gone to France, eighteen months ago, and at the sight of her standing by his bed he was overwhelmed with pride.

"Lois, darling, it's grand to see you. I've been thinking of to-day for months and months and longing for it, and, by God, it was worth going through hell just to have this moment."

Lois was genuinely touched.

"Dickie, darling," she said, kissing him. "Your poor leg. . . ." He was recalled to a sense of duty.

"Look here, old girl, talking about my leg. Our engagement, you know . . . can't tie you, now I'm a crock . . . if you'd rather . . ."

"You silly old thing, I'm proud of it. Besides, you're not a crock, because I'm going to be your crutch." She had read this last remark in a magazine story coming down in the train and, having filed it for future use, thought this an opportune moment for producing it.

"Oh, I'm going to have a perfectly good wooden leg soon, and even now I can get about anywhere on crutches. I'm only in bed to-day because they've been mucking about with the old stump. By the way, where's your mother?"

"Being tactful, as usual. She's going round giving Lady Kinthorpe a few wrinkles on how to run a hospital."

"You never did have any veneration for your parents,

Lois. I hope you'll have more for your husband. Come and tell me about everything."

"Oh, nothing ever happens in London except air-raids and flag-days. You tell me."

And so Dick retailed some of his war experiences and Lois punctuated them with "Oh's" of excitement and incredulity, but when he began to speak of Shannon and Trevannagh and what their loss meant to him, she yawned slightly.

"Dolores Shannon is working at this hospital, isn't she?" she asked. "D'you see much of her?"

"Yes, rather. She's one of the best."

"Um," said Lois dubiously, and changed the subject.

After lasting half an hour, their *tête-à-tête* was broken by the entrance of Lady Kinthorpe and Mrs. Effingham. The latter, after sparring for an opening to kiss him, seemed to think better of it and shook hands.

"It's a pity about your leg," she said reprovingly, as though he were a naughty boy, who had hurt himself while breaking bounds. "Still, if one becomes a soldier, one must expect these things, I suppose."

Dick laughed. "I'm lucky to get off so lightly."

"Well, I want to hear how it all happened," she said magisterially, unwilling to condemn him until she had heard his version of the story. But she soon cut him short and launched into her own reading of the military situation.

"But, mother, Dick must be sick of the war," said Lois as Mrs. Effingham, having demolished Haig and Lloyd George, was turning her batteries upon Foch.

"Yes," agreed Lady Kinthorpe, "we hardly ever talk about the war down here. We just read the papers and swear quietly to ourselves."

It is probable that Mrs. Effingham swore quietly to herself, and an awkward pause was broken by the arrival of Dolores Shannon, with a tray.

"Tea, Dick, and some genuine buttered toast," she said.

Lois took the tray from her rather ostentatiously and, putting it down on the bed, began to cut the toast into small pieces.

"It's my leg that's gone—not one of my arms," said Dick, laughing. "Anyone would think that you were going to feed me."

"And so I am. You mustn't grudge me a little bit of nursing," Lois looked defiantly at Dolores. "Who's the other cup for?"

"For you, Miss Effingham. I thought you'd like to have tea with Dick."

"That's very kind of you, Miss Shannon."

"I expect our own tea's ready," said Lady Kinthorpe. "Come along, Mrs. Effingham, we'll leave the patient alone with his medicine."

"I suppose you're the medicine," said Dick as the others went out. "I don't mind taking a dose. But before meals, mind. No buttered toast first."

As Lois kissed him she whispered:

"I'm fearfully jealous of Dolores Shannon, promise me you won't flirt with her."

"Dol? I don't believe she'll ever think of another man, now Duggie's gone."

"Anyway, promise me."

"I promise, you silly old thing," said Dick, pinching her ear.

They stayed for three days, and Dick vastly enjoyed their visit. But though more in love than ever with Lois, he was forced to admit that in comparison with other girls—Dolores for example,—there were several matters for criticism. Before the war, both had been of the same type, but the war, if it had sobered Dolores, seemed to have intoxicated Lois. That she was just as fond of him as ever he did not for a moment doubt, but she lived in a

world of hasty friendships and jazz-bands—an unsubstantial, hectic world, where one had just time to feel but none to think. She confessed frankly that she had been enjoying herself in London and, insisting that she couldn't prevent men trying to flirt with her, demanded absolution, which was readily granted.

All the same, Dick could not help wondering if she realized what he had been going through while she had been dancing. Yet how could she realize? He knew that she seldom read the newspapers, and the men on leave that she met would be unlikely to say much about the war. Her conception of it was probably based on a few war-plays and Bairnsfather's cartoons. Of course she was only young and thoughtless and he was a disloyal brute for daring to criticize her. . . .

On leaving Poldene the Effinghams were to return to London for a few days and then to go on a long visit to some friends in Scotland. It was mooted that Dick might join them there as soon as he had been discharged from hospital, but the suggestion never materialized into anything more definite than a pious hope, so that he was faced with another long separation from Lois.

Mrs. Effingham laughed at his dismay.

"It's just as well that you shouldn't see too much of each other—now," she said, hinting darkly at the tragedy of marriage. "Besides, I want to get her away from London for a bit and take her to some quiet spot, where there's not quite so much gaiety. I'll see she doesn't forget you."

"As though I ever should, Dickie, darling," murmured Lois.

When they had gone, Dick summoned his trusty counsellors, Lady Kinthorpe and Dolores, and asked to be told what they really and truly thought of her, ready, of course, to be very angry, if their praises were not sufficiently enthusiastic. Lady Kinthorpe was the first to give her opinion.

"I must say I'm not very taken with your future mother-in-law, Dick."

"Oh, bother her! What d'you think of Lois?"

"She's very pretty indeed."

"Yes, isn't she?" cried Dick eagerly.

"She's perfectly sweet," said Dolores, smiling.

"I knew you couldn't help loving her. I'm a lucky devil. Go on, Dol, say something else."

"She knows how to dress, too." She looked down at her plain nurse's costume and sighed.

This was well enough, but Dick wanted to hear what they thought of her character.

"And she's just as charming as she's pretty," he insisted.

"Yes, I'm sure she is, Dick," said Lady Kinthorpe, eager to make amends. "She only wants a little training and then I'm sure she'll make a splendid wife."

"What Lady Kinthorpe really means, Dick, is that she wasn't spanked enough when she was young."

"Nor were you, Dol. I think you're both most invidious; unless you're trying to pull my remaining leg, which is a most unsportsmanlike thing to do."

"Why, of course we were," said Lady Kinthorpe, perceiving an avenue of escape. "Besides, you can't expect any woman to speak well of another woman." And she changed the subject.

Another of Dick's visitors was Charles Shannon, who, since Julian's death, had never been able to keep away from Dolores for long. In Dick's memory he had lived as an urgent, untidy little man with none of the languor and beauty which distinguished his children. During the war he had flung himself into propaganda work, and from being a fairly successful novelist had become a power in the land and was even spoken of as a potential Minister. But sorrow had aged and withered him so that Dick scarcely recognized him, and instead of the broad, jovial charity which had been the keynote of his character, he

was possessed of a satirical bitterness which made him hated and feared by all save a few old friends. He slouched into Dick's room and, after frowning at him for a few minutes, sat down on the bed.

"Well?" he said at length.

Rather timidly Dick tried to congratulate him on his work, but Shannon laughed harshly.

"I've only really succeeded since Julian's death. Pain is a great teacher, Dick, a great teacher. I've learnt many things since then. God! To think of the emotions that I've been trying to describe for the last twenty years! But we know, now, you and I. We understand. But one can pay too big a price for knowledge."

There was a long pause and then he went on abruptly. "I suppose you think mine's an interesting job. So it is. I'm an apostle making converts and I've all the tongues of Pentecost at my command. Besides it's always an honour to have as one's colleague that distinguished British patriot, Sir Julius Mangott.

"That sounds like one of those old Scotch families," said Dick, smiling.

"Of course, he's Sir Julius Morrison nowadays. Sometimes it's a wise child that forgets its own father."

"All the same, it's a great work and a great triumph for you."

Shannon bowed his head.

"Yes, but it's come too late. It's come too late. People will tell you that work, successful work that is, is a cure for sorrow. But it isn't; it's merely a drug. It helps for a moment, but it can't cure. . . ." He was speaking more to himself than to Dick. "Everything comes too late in this world. If success and the moment went hand in hand, what need would there be of heaven?"

Finding nothing to say, Dick was silent, and Shannon went on talking in the same vein with a terse bitterness that never became emotional or incoherent. As he spoke

he developed an odd, unsuspected likeness to his son—a kind of virile caricature of Julian's languid affectations. Drifting away from the personal aspect of the war, he began to denounce the national leaders, and, speaking with inside knowledge, quoted chapter and verse to support his indictment.

"God knows I hate the Germans, but I can't hate them more than I do these old men of ours, who brag and muddle and fail . . . Dignity and decoration and a total lack of common sense. They've no imagination because it's un-British to have an imagination. They worship pig-headedness because it's a British virtue. You can't win a war on tradition. Waterloo isn't a precedent for Cambrai."

Dick managed to interject a question.

"But don't you think we're going to win?"

"No one's going to win. It's only a question of which side is going to lose the least. There's no such thing as a successful war nowadays, in the sense that one nation profits materially at the expense of another. If either side could have won in the first few months, there might have been some profit to be got out of the business, but it's too late now. One of us must die and the other be crippled for generations. War isn't a commercial proposition nowadays."

There was another long pause, and then Shannon looked at his watch.

"I must be going. I've got to catch a train to town and attend a conference. . . . I came down here to see you and to hear the story of Julian's death, but what good can it do for you to tell me or for me to listen? He's dead; nothing can alter that. . . . It's the finality of the thing that hurts. If he'd only been reported missing, I'd have had some strand of hope to clutch at."

He shrugged his shoulders and then went on inconsequently.

"Years ago, I wrote a play. I forget the main plot,

but I remember one of the characters was a strong, capable business man—Jimmy Malone played the part, and damn well, too. He had a daughter who disappeared in a shipwreck, but there was a strong probability that she'd been saved. While this uncertainty remained my strong man could do no work, do nothing but count chances and reckon possibilities. And then came the great scene, where an eyewitness comes to him and tells him that he's seen his daughter perish. And our strong man twitches convulsively—all really good actors are fond of doing that twitch—takes up his pen and says: 'My beautiful dream is over; I am awake again to the truth. And now, thank God, I can work.' A good curtain—and as true to life as Adelphi drama dare be . . . Hope quickens one, it's a stimulant, but certainty is a deadweight. . . . Some day, soon, we'll talk again, Dick. Good-bye, my boy, and get well."

Long after he had gone, Dick pondered over this tragedy of Charles Shannon. Here was one of the discoveries of the war, a man who had leapt from comparative obscurity to sudden fame, and yet the same thing that had given him his chance and made him, had robbed his triumph of its savour. Everything had come too late. He recalled one of Julian's remarks—"Success is like a rare vintage. By the time it's fit to drink, one hasn't got a palate left to appreciate it." One couldn't synchronize one's moments of success and one's moments of happiness. And yet happiness was, in a measure, success. He tried to define his terms, and then came back again from this side track of thought to Charles Shannon. Poor devil! And his case was the case of thousands of others. Some blind, unintelligent god hurt one intolerably and then offered one some wholly inadequate compensation.

The entrance of Dolores cut short his reverie.

"I've got some news for you," she said. "The surgical people have just sent your new wooden leg."

"Thanks," he said, laughing grimly.

At the beginning of November Dick was discharged from hospital with three weeks' leave, after which he was to report himself to a medical board and would then either be invalided out or given a sedentary job. Having received no invitation from Mrs. Effingham, he came to London for his leave, hoping that Lois would be back in town before it was over. However, a few days after his arrival, she wrote to say that her mother was ill with a bad attack of influenza and that therefore their return was indefinitely postponed.

He found leave in London a dreary business. Shunning his old haunts because they reminded him too forcibly of Shannon and Trevannagh, and unable to get about much, he spent most of his time in his hotel. The war seemed to be on its last legs, but people were almost apathetic about it. These continual retreats on the part of the Germans were all very well, but they were not spectacular enough to capture the public imagination. They only served to make government-contractors apprehensive, while the rest of the nation was too cautious or too ignorant to appreciate their full importance.

And then, on November 11, the news came.

As Dick hobbled down to breakfast, a man whom he knew slightly greeted him.

"I hear they've practically fixed up an armistice," he said casually. "It was in some of the evening papers last night, but the report was contradicted. However, there's a fresh crop of rumours this morning. Still, it's been 'Wolf! Wolf!' so often that one doesn't know what to believe."

Dick nodded. "I shouldn't be surprised if it's true this time. The Boche must be getting pretty near the end of his tether. Well—I'm too hungry to speculate about it. So long."

After breakfast Dick went out and sauntered along towards the Strand, with the idea of asking a friend in

the Air Board whether there was any truth in the report. The streets were crowded and every one wore an expression of subdued excitement, as though waiting for something to happen. Then came the official news that the armistice was actually signed, but for the moment it seemed to provoke no outburst of enthusiasm. Men nodded curtly and said "Good," or with a sceptical shrug, "I wonder," and still that feeling of expectancy prevailed. Then, dramatically, the maroons and anti-aircraft guns burst out, and the crowd went suddenly mad. A hoarse roar of cheering went up, swelled in volume, became deafening. There was a mad rush from everywhere to get into the street and traffic was at once suspended. From the window of the Airboard came fluttering down a torrent of army forms and a venerable staff-officer appeared perilously and unexpectedly upon the roof.

A woman near Dick looked round her with a puzzled expression.

"An air-raid?" she muttered, and then, suddenly realizing, began to weep. "My boys; give me back my boys." As though peace were going to restore everything.

Next to her stood a fat, prosperous-looking man, whom Dick recognized as an army contractor of almost fabulous wealth and dishonesty. He was smoking a large cigar and tears were rolling absurdly down his cheeks. In his hand he clutched a twopenny Union Jack, which he waved from time to time.

"Good ole flag," he kept repeating with maudlin insistence. "Good ole flag."

Dick regarded him with disgust.

"You've done a damn lot to keep it flying," he said.

But the man took no notice.

"Good ole flag," he said again, while a tear, after hanging absurdly for a moment at the corner of his mouth, trickled along his double chin.

A brigadier, who seemed to be the senior officer in the

immediate neighbourhood and who held the reputation of being the best-hated man in the War Office, was, to his vast surprise, seized by a party of New Zealanders and "chaired" along the Strand to the strains of "See the Conquering Hero Comes." Another gang, headed by a R.A.F. lady-driver, commandeered a taxi and, unable to move, sat there co-opting fresh passengers until the springs broke.

Feeling some discomfort from standing so long, Dick decided to make his way back to his hotel in Piccadilly, but he found it practically impossible to move. With difficulty he succeeded in reaching Trafalgar Square, but it was too hard a job for a one-legged man to force his way across it. By dint of strenuous pushing, he managed to skirt the eastern side of the square, and then finding a comparatively clear road, walked up towards the Hippodrome. Leicester Square was pretty full, but he had struggled half-way across, when a cheering mob of Colonials, linking arms, charged the crowd and forced Dick up a side street. The doors of the Brasserie Latine loomed invitingly before him, and he entered.

Inside pandemonium reigned. The "Marseillaise" was perhaps the leading *motif* of the din, but "God Save the King" and "Over There" were close rivals. Finding an empty chair the previous occupant of which had mounted the table to get a better view of things, Dick sat down gratefully. Next to him stood a girl who was addressing the world at large but without attracting an audience. She spoke vile French with a Cockney accent and in the intervals of speech wept copiously. On Dick becoming sympathetic and inquiring the cause of her sorrow, she explained that she was a Serbian, and that she felt her country was being slighted, because no one was making any attempt to sing its National Anthem.

As if to corroborate this story she produced a small Serbian flag from her muff and waved it with one hand,

while with the other she strove to repair her tear-ravaged complexion with a powder-puff.

"I'm afraid I don't know it," said Dick, "but if you'll get up on the table and sing it, I'll beat time with this spoon. The others'll soon take it up."

Joyfully accepting this offer, she climbed up on to the table and began a doleful ballad, while Dick banged a plate lustily. Unfortunately she happened to run foul of a lady at the next table, who had collected a chorus for "Rule Britannia." A scuffle ensued and then, weeping once more, the sole supporter of a very gallant ally was led out by two waiters.

At the other end of the café Dick espied Praed, who was executing a dangerous *pas seul* with each foot on a different table. Having fallen heavily on to a settee amid ironic cheers, he left his corner and came over to where Dick was sitting.

"Hullo," he said. "Have a drink."

Dick stared at him. "I've known you a good many years, Praed," he said offensively, "but I've never known you offer anyone a drink before."

"Oh, that's all right," replied the other, as though condoning a *gaucherie*, and for a moment his voice ordering two brandies dominated the uproar.

"You're looking pretty glum—don't seem to realize there's a peace on. What are you doing by way of celebration?"

"Counting heads," said Dick sombrely.

Praed nodded. "Oh, I know lots of 'em are gone, but this isn't the time to be morbid. Where's young Shannon and that other fellow?—never could remember his name."

"Dead."

"I'm sorry." He paused, and then with the air of bestowing a splendid epitaph: "I liked them both."

The drinks arrived and Praed lifted his glass.

"I give you a toast. I drink to the memory of brave

men," he said simply, and Dick was touched. Then after a pause : " And how about yourself ? Have you come through all right ? "

" As you see, I'm alive, but minus a leg, which doesn't exactly contribute to the enjoyment of one's body."

" I see, they've paid in full and you're paying by instalments."

Dick grinned. " Yes. I'm paying by instalments."

" In that case, I suppose it's no use asking you to come and have a dance," said Praed surprisingly, and a moment later his ungainly body was swaying between the tables in a sort of debauched hornpipe.

Though more liquor was upset than drunk, long before lunch one could count the tolerably sober people in the café on the fingers of one hand. There were one or two fights, and a vast amount of crockery was smashed, but the supply of drink, glass and good humour seemed inexhaustible. Dick watched the scene, half disgusted, half amused. He felt immeasurably superior to these elemental people, who had no sense of proportion or restraint, and then he cursed himself for an emotional prig. Praed shouted across to him to come and join his party at lunch, but Dick shook his head. He preferred the passive rôle of spectator. And yet if Julian and Douglas had been alive, what a day they would have made of it.

A girl squeezed into the empty seat beside him and began renovating her complexion, which had suffered considerably at the hands of a humorist with a syphon.

" You're looking down in the dumps, dear," she said chattily. " Quite the dismal Jimmy. Have one on me. A drop of what killed Auntie and a spot of orange is *my* proscription. . . . I made four quid last night and I feel like splashing it. Here, Orgust, two gin and orange."

" It's very good of you," said Dick, gratefully, and then, acting upon a sudden impulse : " You'd better have some

lunch with me. I'm feeling damnably lonely here, but I'm too tired to try and get home on my wooden-leg."

"You got a wooden-leg? Gee, that's rough. You bet I'll lunch with you—or dine or sup or anything." She slipped her arm through his. "Come on, kid; let the battle begin."

The picture of Lois and Mrs. Effingham flitted through Dick's mind and he smiled. He wondered what they would have said could they have seen him—especially Mrs. Effingham.

As the meal progressed, Dick learnt that his companion's name was Billy, that until recently she had been "kept" by a major in the War Office but was now on her own, and that "she didn't care two blasts on a tin-whistle for anyone."

Finding him rather uncommunicative she began to cross-examine him.

"I believe you're married," she said as one who hints at a shameful possibility.

"No."

"Well, engaged, then. Anyone, can see it with their eyes shut."

"Yes, I'm engaged."

"Don't marry her then, kid; it ain't worth it. It's rot being tied to anyone, for long and, besides, all girls is much of a muchness. I expect she powders her nose and snores the same as I do."

Dick frowned.

"Oh, I know. S'pose I'm not fit to speak of her. What B.F.'s men are! You think a girl who's been down on her luck can't be white and that a girl who's straight that way is straight all ways."

This was Shannon's doctrine all over again and Dick smiled.

"No, I don't," he said gently. "But—suppose we change the subject."

"Right-o, dear. You're not fed up with me, are you ? . . . Those oysters have given me the indi. ; and what with all this fizz on top of them, I'll be in bed for a week."

There was a pause while the powder-puff came into play again and then Dick harked back to a never-failing topic.

"Tell me some more about yourself."

"Oh, my life's a ruddy romance. If I told you, you wouldn't believe me."

"Why not ?"

"Because it wouldn't be true, and if I told you the truth, you wouldn't believe that either."

"I might."

She looked at him suspiciously.

"You haven't got much to say for yourself, George, and it seems up to me to do all the talking." She settled down to enjoy herself. "Well, my dad was a lieutenant and Q.M.—before the war, that was." She emphasized the fact with pride. "He went out with the first lot an' got done in at Mons—miles behind the line he was, but they got him all the same. And then mother took up with a dirty Jew, the oily . . . He tried his games on me first, but this child wasn't having any. Well, mother wanted me to go and live with them, but you couldn't expect me to do that, could you, dear ? I have to draw the line somewhere. . . . Jest look at that girl over there—calls herself 'Billy,' same as me. Copied it from me, I shouldn't wonder. Cheek ! She's common, that's what she is. I don't let men muck me about like that in public, so don't try any funny stuff on me, George. That's all right, dear, I can see you aren't that sort. . . . Well, as I was saying, mother wanted me to go and live with them. Of course, he was behind it all, but she didn't know. But I told her straight. God, she didn't half get mad ! 'I'll see you walking up and down the Strand,' she says, *which* is where she's wrong, because I never go

further east than the Hippodrome. 'Well,' I said, 'that 'ud be better than what you're going to do. I'm through with you,' I said, an' with that I quit and I haven't seen her since. . . . Gee! it's hot in here! It's a waste of powder trying to make oneself look nice, because it doesn't last five minutes and, anyhow, every one's blotto, so it don't matter."

"What happened next?" asked Dick after a pause.

"Say; you want to know the hell of a lot, George. Are you going to write an article on 'Our Fallen Sisters' for the Church magazine?"

"No, it's pure curiosity."

"Of course, if you put it that way, dear . . . yes, just one more glass, perhaps; we don't have a peace-day every day, do we? And I'm not sizzled, yet—not started really. . . . Well, after I left home, I came here for a bit and then I got fed up, and answered an advert. for a nurse and lady-help at Balham—some nursemaid, believe me! It was all right in its way, but a bit of a come-down. And then the eldest son came back on leave—he was a lad, he was—and of course there was a rumpus and I had to go. Not that they could prove anything, my dear, but I didn't stop to argue the point. So I came back here for a bit and then I went as a V.A.D. to a hospital in Surrey, washing up plates and things. They didn't know anything about me, of course, and I wangled it something wonderful. And there I met my boy—a captain he was, an' he'd lost his leg, the same as you. We were just mad about each other and, of course, he thought I was on the straight. And so I was, then, though it wasn't easy. He gave me this ring, and we were going to be married as soon as the war was over. Why, that 'ud be now, wouldn't it?" She laughed harshly. "He was just mad to get out again, wooden-leg and all, so he went into the Kite Balloons. All the time he was out I kept straight, and then, about eighteen months ago, he was killed. So I chucked up

things at the hospital and came back here, and here I am." She smiled brightly at him and, producing a grease-stick from her bag, began to redden her lips. "I don't know why I told you all this, dear—must be getting a bit blotto—still, you asked for it, didn't you?"

"Yes," said Dick, unable to think of an appropriate comment.

"See that boy over there waving to me?" she asked after a pause. "I more or less fixed things up with him for to-night, unless——"

Dick shook his head.

"No? Well, just as you like, dear. You don't mind if I go across?"

"Of course not. I ought to be getting back to my pub."

"Thanks very much for lunch," she said almost primly. "Hope I haven't bored you."

"Lord—no. It's good of you to have told me all this. What amazes me is that you can still be cheery on top of it all."

She laughed. "No use crying overspilt milk and, anyway, we've won, haven't we?"

Dick looked round the smoky, crowded room at the noisy, drunken men and the greedy, unwholesome women, with the perspiration oozing through their paint. It was an ignoble scene.

"Yes," he said, "I suppose we've won."

Between him and his hotel lay the No Man's Land of Piccadilly Circus, which was filled by a howling mob, dancing madly round the wreck of a motor-lorry, and it was only by pleading his wooden-leg that he was allowed to pass without joining the ring. Having regained his hotel, he sat at his window watching the crowd below with a sort of bitter amusement. He thought of the girl with whom he had lunched and of the story which she had told him. Perhaps hers was the sounder philosophy,—just laugh at the funny things in life and ignore the sad.

Seeing him at the window, a girl down below waved to him and he waved back mechanically. She was dressed in deep mourning, but a Union Jack and a Tricolour straggled grotesquely from her widow's bonnet. She kissed her hand to him with impudent grace.

"Death is swallowed up in victory," muttered Dick and turned away from the window.

Just before dinner he wandered down into the lounge. Great preparations for the evening were in progress and the whole place was brave with bunting. If only Shannon and Trevannagh had been there !

The head waiter came across to him.

"Will you be alone this evening, sir, or are you having any friends? Most of our visitors are giving parties to-night and we want to make proper arrangements."

"Yes," said Dick, yielding to an unaccountable impulse, "you might lay for three at my table. Two friends of mine may turn up, but of course, one can't count on anyone to-day."

"Oh, quite, sir, quite; I'll see to it, sir."

And so in due course Dick sat down to dinner, with a place seemingly empty on either side of him. Yet in his imagination Trevannagh sat on his right, eating an immense meal, while, on his left, Shannon toyed with his food and expounded his philosophy.

He ordered a bottle of champagne, and told the waiter to fill the two empty glasses. The latter looked at him askance and then, deciding, with the broad charity of his class, that this was some drunken whim, did as he was told. Dick raised his glass and bowed first to the right and then to the left before drinking and then, with a revulsion of feeling, realized that he was being not only morbid but also theatrical. One must live in the present, he thought.

He toasted Lois in a full glass and felt better. If she could have been here to-night, it would have been some-

thing—everything. A sudden gush of self-pity overcame him. How abominably lonely he was! Never mind, though, in a few months he would be married and have Lois always with him, surely a good excuse for another glass. And so by the time that dinner was finished and the dance was beginning, Dick, tolerably drunk, was able to watch the proceedings with a certain amount of sympathy. Only at midnight when the band, breaking off in the middle of a dance, struck up “Auld Lang Syne,” did that feeling of loneliness return to him. Nor was he the only one. Next to him, an ancient Colonel, who, throwing off his years, had been dancing with the best of them, broke down and began to weep, becoming suddenly and consciously an old man again. Few were unmoved, and when the song was finished there was for a moment a magic hush, while each paid silent tribute to his dead.

The spell was broken by a girl's voice:

“Don't tell me that's the end, Bobbie. It's a beastly shame if it is.”

Dick stared at the girl angrily. Both voice and face reminded him of Lois, and the resemblance hurt him. Once again a distaste for all this gaiety seized him and he hobbled upstairs to his room, where the loneliness within seemed intensified by the clamour outside. Supremely tired, he was soon asleep, dreaming that he was back at Harrow and Oxford again with Shannon and Trevannagh always in the forefront of the picture. The last phase of his dream was of their cottage on the river; the three of them and Von Ecke were just about to start a game of tennis.

He awoke to find his room illuminated by a flickering light, which wrought strange phantoms upon the walls. Outside the crowd, dancing round the burning wreckage of an Army hut, were singing “Rule Britannia.” The memory of that night of August 4, 1914, smote him—a memory and a comparison. He thought of the fine

enthusiasms, the gallant hopes, the true comradeship. He thought of all that he had had then, and of all that he had lost now. And burying his face in the pillow, he sobbed like a child.

CHAPTER VI

IT was some two months later that Dick found himself again in London. After the Armistice he had gone back to Poldene, Lady Kinthorpe having invited him to stay there as long as he pleased. Indeed it had become a second home to him, and though as a hospital it was gradually emptying, he found in his hostess and in Dolores all the companionship he needed.

Lois, meanwhile, remained inaccessibly in Scotland. Having let their house in Wimbledon for the autumn, the Effinghams had taken a small place in the Highlands until their own home should once more be empty, and Dick, since they never invited him up there, was too proud to go and stay at the local inn on his own. He wrote every two or three days to Lois, but her letters were brief and infrequent, stating only that she was having a splendid time and was dreading her return to Wimbledon. She had also become addicted to the picture post card habit and would send him a Highland view (in three colours) with the legend "had a cold but glorious picnic here to-day, love, Lois." And Dick, with his vast appetite for love, found this starvation diet.

At last, however, came the news that the family was returning home, and he rushed up to town to meet them. Breaking his journey, he stayed the night at Guildford and visited the house which his father had bought there in the early days of the war. Since his death the place had remained empty, but in one of the rooms were hoarded

all the personal papers and belongings of the Goodalls, and here Dick spent a long day among legal documents, letters and bills.

All his letters from school he found methodically tied up with the "reports" jutting out from the bundle to mark the end of each term. Some of these he read, curiously, impersonally, as though they had been written by some other boy and he were trying to make out that boy's character from them; rather a prig, he found him, with a strong vein of selfishness. But all those letters from Harrow and Oxford were crammed with anecdotes and allusions to Shannon and Trevannagh and for this he prized them, sorting out the more interesting ones for further reading. Another find was his mother's diary, which, with its quaint "great thoughts" wedged in amongst a recital of household duties, brought the writer vividly before him. One entry, "Dick was rude to me to-day. 'Honour thy father and mother,'" hurt him profoundly and abruptly he closed the book.

And then he came across a heavily-sealed packet addressed to him in Shannon's handwriting. Across the envelope was scrawled, "To be opened in the event of my death," and remembering the circumstances under which it had been given him, he hesitated. He was immensely curious to see what the packet contained, but there were other papers to go through, and so he put it aside in the rapidly-increasing bundle which he was taking with him to read at his leisure.

It was this packet which confronted him on his first morning in London. He had just finished breakfast and, though the lounge of the hotel was almost deserted, he felt somehow that he ought to open it in absolute privacy, so he took it upstairs to his bedroom before breaking the seal.

"MY DEAR OLD DICK," he read. "By the time you open

this, I shall, according to popular theology, be playing a harp—a detestable instrument. Popular theology again (endorsed by no less an authority than Bartlett's Familiar Quotations—see section William Shakespeare) stigmatizes my present home as the bourne from which no traveller returns, but upon this point, as you know, I have long since joined issue with the Church. For a long time I have believed—and never with more certainty than now—that communication with the dead is possible. It is a riddle which it is well worth dying to solve, and so I propose to you an experiment, which, if successful, must convince you. As you see, there is another sealed enclosure inside this packet, and I want you to take the latter, still sealed, to a reputable medium. If the medium can tell you what it contains, I submit to you that it will be conclusive proof that my intelligence has survived death. There can be no question of telepathy, because no one save myself can have any idea what is written in it, and if I can transmit that knowledge through the medium to you, I fail to see how you can doubt that I still exist as a distinct and separate entity.

“ You have often scoffed at spiritualism, old chap, and we have come as near to quarrelling over it as you and I could do, but I conjure you in the name of our friendship to do as I ask you. Failure can do nobody any harm, while success would be of an importance so vast as to make this war in comparison a small matter.

“ That I must go and that Duggie must go also was long ago revealed to me, though I did not understand the manner of our passing. But this war is the answer to many riddles. I never told you, of course, for I knew that though you would jeer at me, you would at the same time be worried. But in a fit of madness I told Duggie, and I have blamed myself for this ever since. Luckily he shared your opinion about spiritualism and only laughed at me. I trust that he has long ago forgotten all about it.

"It is a strange feeling, this belief that one is under sentence of death, and you will now better appreciate my moments of depression. I am so sure that Duggie and I will pass over within the next year or two that my mind refuses to make plans for any future upon earth. All I hope is that you, Dick, may be happy, and if from the other side one can in any way control things upon this side, you may be certain that I shall be watching over you. I have very little idea of what the conditions will be like, but there must, of course, be a change, and to this change I look forward with the most profound confidence and curiosity. I feel sure that you will not fail to do as I ask you, and in this belief I sign myself,

"Yours till we meet again,

"JULIAN."

Dick re-read the letter and then sat smoking for a few minutes with a puzzled frown on his face. He fingered the smaller envelope which had been enclosed in the packet, trying to see it as the key to a vital question, but he could not bring himself to believe that a final answer to the great riddle might lie in that commonplace piece of paper. Other considerations attacked his mind. Was Julian pulling his leg? The prophecy of his death was safe enough, since Dick would never have opened it, had he survived. He dismissed the thought as beside the point. . . . He knew very little of spiritualism, had never dabbled in it since those few experiments at Oxford and hated and feared the whole subject as something unclean and unhealthy. What had Julian ever got out of it, save a chance message, which he had taken as a prophecy, that he and Douglas would be killed? Yet since it was in the nature of a dying request, Dick felt that he must make this experiment, distasteful though it might be. Moreover, it was only a matter of an hour or so at the most. . . .

Though he knew enough about the subject not to dismiss it as a glorified hoax, he was at heart too much his mother's son not to dislike the unorthodox in religion. Nor did he imagine that his faith could in any way be strengthened by such a revelation, however startling. In any case this was no matter for argument. Julian wished it and it must be done.

On his last visit to town he had made the acquaintance of a lady who, having lost her husband in the war, had found comfort in spiritualism. It was her sole topic of conversation, and he remembered that she had spoken with enthusiasm of a Mrs. Morriarty, a medium, who lived at Torrington Road, Brondesbury. Twice a week she made a pilgrimage to this suburban shrine and she had bored Dick so extensively by a description of her experiences that the woman's name and address had somehow stuck in his memory. It might as well be Mrs. Morriarty as anyone else. A phrase of his friend's occurred to him: "Whenever I'm feeling wretched and the pain is more than I can bear, I just ring up Mrs. Morriarty." So the woman was on the telephone. Rising with a sigh, he went in search of a directory. He had come up to town to see Lois and now this strange mission had been thrust upon him. Vaguely he wished it was not such a simple matter, that there might be some excuse for delay.

A common, high-pitched voice answered his query as to whether Mrs. Morriarty was in.

"Speaking."

"I want to know when you can let me have a—a sitting," said Dick, uncertain if he were using the right technical expression.

"Wait a moment. I must look at my engagement book. I'm very busy just now. . . . Ah! I see I've got a cancelled sitting for to-morrow at eleven. You can come then if you like." There was a hint of condescension in the voice.

"Well——" said Dick and paused. Lois's train was due at twelve.

"I'm absolutely booked up for the next month apart from that. It so happens that the sitting for to-morrow is cancelled. Still——"

"All right." Lois had said she would not expect him to go to the station on account of his leg and he could explain afterwards.

"It's that or nothing." She seemed to think that Dick did not fully appreciate his luck.

"All right," said Dick again, "my name's——"

"Don't give me your name. Eleven to-morrow, then——punctually, please."

Accordingly at eleven the next morning he presented himself at No. 8, Torrington Road, a vulgar, pretentious little villa, which he found was admirably suited to Mrs. Morriarty. Her voice had surprised him, but her appearance fairly staggered him. Surely no cult ever had a stranger priestess! She was a large, untidy woman, with dyed hair, gold teeth, a dirty pink blouse, white spats and a general impression of common prosperity. What spirit could choose such a mouthpiece?

She smiled at him invitingly.

"Come right through. I always work in a little summer-house at the end of the garden. I find I get better results there."

Steering a difficult course through bamboo tables and bric-à-brac, Dick followed her through the hall and across a small patch of lawn to a plain wooden shed. Inside, there was a table and several chairs and the whole place reeked of varnish. The woman closed the shutters, leaving the hut in semi-darkness, and Dick sat down feeling mystified and annoyed.

"Well?" she said.

Aware of a total lack of sympathy on the part of his audience, Dick began to explain his mission.

"No names, please," she insisted, like a conjurer who asks not to be told the suit of the chosen card.

When he produced the sealed envelope she showed some sort of professional interest.

"This is quite remarkable. Of course, I can't promise success. That depends entirely on the conditions. You understand that my control, Zenia, speaks to you, and success or failure depends more on her than on me. She's a French girl, but I believe she speaks quite good English," she added patronizingly as though referring to a protégée.

Dick nodded. "I see."

She sat down in one of the chairs and there followed a silence broken only by her hurried breathing. Her eyes were closed and her commonplace features were ennobled by a strange look of determination. Her hands stirred in quick, convulsive gestures, a symptom which became more marked, until communicating itself to the whole body, it resembled epilepsy. It seemed that she was no longer exercising any volition over her movements, and Dick appreciated the aptness of the phrase "going under control." Then the fit passed and she gave vent to an interminable sigh, which seemed to draw all the breath from her body. She lay back still and rigid. There came another interval of utter silence.

At length her lips began to move, but for awhile no sound issued from them. Then a thick, unintelligible muttering, like a person under chloroform, until slowly the voice became distinctly articulate, speaking rapidly in broken English. That this was no trick, he did not for a moment doubt. The deep, common voice with its studied languidness could not conceivably have imitated this quick, high-pitched garrulity.

"Zenia say there is a spirit is wishing to speak you. Very anxious. Oh, very anxious. He tall and dark and wear a brown uniform. Dark eyes and thin lips. Now he try to give Zenia his name. He build up the letter

J . . . J-U-L. Julius. No. He shake his head. . . . He ask if you remember this place. A—oh—so little river with trees meeting over, and little flat boats, that one push with a pole. He say that you there with him (The Cherwell, thought Dick, but why should Julian remind me of that? Hasn't he got anything better to say?) And now he laugh, he laugh very much. He say he meet a friend. He building up letter D. He say both very happy. He say he meet your uncle. He make the name Tom—a very old gentleman, fat and jolly. (Dick, who had never possessed an uncle Tom, was completely mystified.) There is, oh so many spirits wish to speak you. The friend he is gone and a woman come. So faint, so faint. Zenia not understand.” And so the voice went on, sometimes clear, pertinent, astonishing in its knowledge, and then, when it seemed on the brink of revelation, drifting away into a meaningless jumble. To Dick it appeared that Julian and Douglas, his father and mother, were in fact at times inspiring the voice, but there was also a host of vague personalities and names which he could not identify and in which he could have no conceivable interest. And even when he recognized some touch, which only Shannon or Trevannagh could have supplied, there was nothing cardinal nor vital in the message.

Holding the precious envelope, he sat there, profoundly puzzled; impressed, yet disappointed. It was very extraordinary, but not in the least helpful, and he found it fatally easy to read all sorts of meanings into these incoherent ramblings.

For three-quarters of an hour the seance continued upon these lines. After ten minutes' absence, during which an unknown spirit had been telling Dick a long and pointless story, Julian seemed to return and began sending through some preposterous message about a tennis-match. And then there came a pause.

“Can I ask a question?” He had no idea whether

he could speak to the "control" and felt it was almost an impertinence.

"If Zenia understand, she try to answer."

Uncomfortably he framed his question.

"Ask him about this envelope."

The woman's lips began to work, but no sound came and the effort appeared to exhaust the power, for presently the movement of the lips ceased, the mouth remaining open. For a minute she lay thus, stiff, silent, barely breathing. And then, suddenly, Shannon's voice was speaking. He spoke slowly and with difficulty, as though the form of communication was unwonted, and there was an unfamiliar note of urgency; but of the identity of the speaker Dick had no doubt. Shocked and amazed, he buried his face in his hands.

"Dick, Dick, I've got something to tell you. . . . And yet . . . everything's so different . . . something to do with a piece of paper . . . something important . . . I don't know. It's gone." The voice grew weaker, seeming to come from a great distance. "You must believe, Dick. You can't doubt any more. . . . Duggie. . . ." It trailed away unintelligibly and there was a long silence.

Then "Zenia" spoke again. "Friend gone now. He say he sending some one to you to comfort you. . . . Take the pain away. . . . And some day he speak you again. He build up the letter D . . . D-O-L. . . . He say you be happy soon . . . Dol. . . . Power is going . . . you . . . not more . . . power going."

Another silence followed and, overcome by curiosity, Dick tore open the envelope. Scrawled in Shannon's handwriting upon a card inside, was Maeterlinck's memorable declaration, "*Il n'y a pas des morts.*"

There came again that long-drawn-out sigh and the woman began to stir, moving convulsively at first and then becoming normal. She rubbed her eyes with her knuckles and looked up at Dick. Supreme weariness was

written upon her face, as though her own spirit had had to fight its way back into its home. For a minute neither spoke.

"Well?" she asked at length.

Dick found it hard to adapt himself to ordinary conditions.

"It was won-wonderful," he stammered.

She noticed the envelope in his hand and remembered the test.

"Did I?"

"No . . . but my friend actually spoke to me." And he told her exactly what had happened.

"Really. It's what we call the direct voice or direct control. It's never happened to me before. . . . I feel very tired. I don't think I've ever felt so exhausted. Of course, it's a great strain on the medium. . . . Don't come to me again, please, I couldn't stand another sitting like this."

"Very well." He rose and held out his hand. "The whole thing has been amazing. Good-bye; I can't thank you. Er—how much do I owe you?"

"One guinea, please," she said with the professional manner of a doctor.

Dick put the money on the table. "Good-bye," he said again.

"Good morning. D'you think you could find your own way out? You'll excuse me. I'm too tired to move."

Dick hobbled out through the trumpery little hall into the sunshine. Twenty yards away a motor-bus had broken down and the driver, with the aid of much profanity and a spanner, was trying to put things right, while a small crowd jeered at an old gentleman, who remained stolidly and optimistically inside. Dick stood there watching the scene, trying to get into touch again with the everyday business of life.

"'Aven't you got nothing better to do, sir, than look at a broken-down bus?"

Turning round he found himself confronted by a large and fatherly constable. "Wonderful, 'ow anything like that draws a crowd," he went on philosophically. "But motor accidents don't collect 'em like the 'orses used ter. . . . You take my advice, sir, an' go and find a bit er lunch."

Dick looked at his watch and found that it was after one o'clock. He must have been standing there for the best part of half an hour. Lois would have been home for hours and was, no doubt, wondering why he didn't come, was probably expecting him to turn up for lunch at Wimbledon. And here was he, completely forgetful of her, staring aimlessly at a broken-down bus. It was inexcusable.

"That's not a bad idea of yours, constable. I wonder if there's a taxi about anywhere?"

"There you are, sir. Hi, taxi!"

"Where d'you want to go to?" asked the driver suspiciously.

"Wimbledon."

"Wimbledon," repeated the man as though Dick had suggested Antarctic exploration. "Not to-day, sonny."

But he had reckoned without Dick's ally.

"You drive the gentleman where 'e wants to go," commanded the policeman. "You know the law as well as I do. If you got your little flag up an' 'e says 'Hi,' that's a contrac' an' you got to take 'im where 'e tells you. Com-pree?"

The taxi-man seemed impressed. "All right. I'll take yer," he said, as one who makes an exception.

During the drive Dick had time to rearrange his thoughts. It was hard to reconcile the revelation of the morning with the prospective love-making of the afternoon. Lois was bound to be interested in his experience, but would she attach the same importance to it that he did? And then in the thought of seeing her again, of holding her in his

arms, he forgot everything else. He began to work out plans for the future. He would make her definitely fix a date for their wedding : there was no reason for any further delay. One couldn't very well get abroad for one's honeymoon, but Devonshire would be ideal, or perhaps the New Forest, or the Lakes. And in weighing these alternatives, his mind was occupied, until the taxi drew up outside her home.

He was shown up into the empty drawing-room and waited there with a quickening thrill of anticipation. It was ten months since he had last seen her, and he decided that he would never let her out of his sight again for more than an hour or two. He began to prowl impatiently about the room. She ought to be ashamed of keeping a fellow waiting like this. Surely she must have heard him arrive and should have been at the door to welcome him, instead of powdering her nose or putting the finishing touches to her hair, or whatever it was she was doing. Perhaps she was purposely tantalizing him.

And then Lois entered, cool and beautiful in her dark-blue travelling-dress, but even in his excitement Dick noticed that she looked very pale and that her mouth, instead of expressing its usual invitation, was set and determined. He went to take her in his arms, but she waved him back with a curt gesture.

"What's the matter, old girl ? A cold and you're afraid I'll catch it ? Why, I'd risk double pneumonia for a kiss !"

"No. I'm quite all right, thanks. Sit down, Dick, I want to talk to you."

Puzzled and angry, he obeyed.

"What's the matter, Lois ? Are you fed up with me or what ? Has the glamour of khaki faded, as the papers say ?" He laughed uneasily. "Of course, I know I'm not a one-legged hero any more : it might have happened in a bus accident."

But Lois remained silent.

"Well?" he said at length.

"I want you to be serious. Have you—have you always played the game, Dick?"

"Played the game?"

"I mean as regards other girls." She did not look at him and her voice was low and uncertain. "These women . . . I mean; should I be the first?"

Dick considered the question. "No," he said. "I told you before. No. But you said you understood, so what does it matter? Since I've known you, I've been absolutely true to you—absolutely true." The banality of the phrase annoyed him. "I've never even looked at another woman since we've been engaged. You know that."

"But before?"

"I've told you," he said shortly.

"Then you haven't always played the game."

"I don't understand what you mean by that expression."

"I've just explained."

"Well?"

"If you haven't played the game, why should I?" she asked, but still she did not look at him.

The fear which had been clutching at his heart became certainty, but he made up his mind that he would not let her see how much she hurt him. Shannon had taught him to conceal his emotions and, although his hand trembled, he spoke with a kind of pedantic mockery.

"I don't know where you picked up this extraordinary doctrine about playing the game, my dear Lois. But if you want to break our engagement can't you do it without a dissertation upon sexual ethics?"

"I couldn't marry a man who hadn't been straight," she muttered.

"And may I ask who the paragon is—I suppose there is one—who boasts all the virtues that I haven't got? Is

he something romantic in a kilted regiment or a profiteer with two legs and ten thousand a year?"

"How dare you," flamed Lois. He had never seen her really angry before and the sight displeased him. She was petty, common, rather like one of the women at the Brasserie Latine, whose gentility had been impugned. He was too much hurt to spare her.

"You're quite right, Lois. As the daughter of a stock-broker you show real business instinct, which would delight your father. Always sell out when a more profitable investment turns up."

"I didn't know you'd take it this way or I wouldn't have tried to spare your feelings."

"Oh, I quite appreciate your delicacy. You haven't even told me in so many words that you're going to chuck me over. But though apparently a fool in most things, I can take a hint with the best."

There was a pause, and then Lois slipped off the ring which he had given her and which she herself had chosen, "because every one can see it's an engagement ring." She laid it on a little table which stood between them and the clink of it against the polished wood broke the silence effectively. Feeling that he could no longer maintain his composure, Dick rose, determined that she should not enjoy the triumph of seeing how much she had hurt him. He must make a brave, careless exit at all costs. But as he levered himself up on the arms of his chair his wooden-leg slipped and the little table fell with a crash, shooting the ring under a sofa. Knowing that he could not possibly retrieve it himself, he waited, cursing his clumsiness, while Lois searched for it on hands and knees. He couldn't go and leave her there: that would only lead to further explanations. The absurdity of the scene struck him, but it only increased his bitterness. Till then he had had the comfort of being master of the situation, but now even that was denied him, and he stood there awkwardly, a foolish,

discredited lover. His romance was dying, and dying not in tragedy but in farce.

Those few moments during which Lois grovelled under the sofa seemed an eternity. Would she never find the cursed thing? At last she rose and handed it to him without a word and with a pitiful attempt at a smile he took it, though his hand shook so much that he nearly dropped it again. Picking up his hat and stick, he hobbled towards the door.

"I'm—I'm sorry, Dickie," said Lois, and the corners of her mouth quivered. He tried to think of a retort but none came.

"I've been a beast, Dickie."

"And this afternoon I've been talking like a cad. We should have made a rotten team, Lois."

"I couldn't go on. I couldn't," she sobbed.

"Now the war's over, wooden-legs, like all other Government stocks, are at a discount. One can pick them up for practically nothing, I'm told."

"Don't."

"Good-bye, my dear," said Dick, gently. But there was no answer, and he left her there weeping forlornly, as though it was her heart that was broken.

As he turned to have a last look at the house, a woman with a baby in her arms accosted him. Absorbed in his thoughts, for the moment he hardly noticed her, but pouring out her tale she kept pace with him and at length the words became intelligible:

"Spare something for the baiby, sir . . . 'arf starving, 'e is, an' I 'aven't 'ad a bite since yesterday. 'Is father got killed in the war, jus' before 'e was comin' on leave, it was. We was going to be married, but 'e went West an' lef me with baiby. I see you been in the army to, sir, so spare something for a soldier's kiddie. Just a copper, sir, and bless you, sir."

"You say you were engaged to be married?" asked Dick, stopping.

"Yes, sir; that's gorspel truth, that is."

"Did your friend ever give you an engagement ring?"

The woman looked at him suspiciously.

'E never give me no ring," she said.

Dick fumbled in his pocket. "Then, upon behalf of the British Army, allow me to repair a regrettable omission," he said gravely, and thrust the ring into her hand. Dumb and bewildered, she stared first at Dick and then at the diamonds glittering in her grimy palm, and at the look in her eyes, half frightened, half covetous, he burst out laughing.

Convinced that she was dealing with a lunatic, the woman edged uncomfortably away from him, and then, reassured by the memory of his limping gait, turned and walked quickly off.

Dick wandered along aimlessly. The encounter with the woman had served to distract his mind for the time being, but the misery soon returned and he could find no comfort. His world had been narrowed down by death until it had come to mean Lois and Lois only—and now she had failed him. His thoughts turned to suicide and he cursed himself for a melodramatic fool. The idea of a headline, "One-legged corpse in Wimbledon Pond," made him laugh, and with bitter humour he worked it up into a typical paragraph, with the inevitable catch-phrases and hints of foul play. It was a grotesque and undignified solution.

Weariness came upon him suddenly. He must have walked several miles across the Common, further than he had ever attempted since he had lost his leg. A taxi-driver, noticing his limp and scenting a fare, was crawling along the road and Dick hailed him.

"Where to?" asked the man.

"Where to?" repeated Dick vaguely. "Oh—I don't care a damn—anywhere you like."

"Wot about Piccadilly Circus?" he suggested with an air of inspiration.

"Excellent."

It was nearly five o'clock when the taxi pulled up outside the Criterion and the driver, after inspecting his metre with reproachful incredulity, suggested double fare in a spirit of generous compromise. Dick settled with him and, as he turned, a girl stumbled against him. She gave a little frightened "Oh" and looked at him with furtive, expectant eyes. Having collided in the same way with a dozen men during the last half-hour without result, her optimism was waning. Dick raised his hat.

"I beg your pardon—why, by God! it's Babette." And Babette it was, a little more rouged and powdered than of yore, but otherwise unchanged.

"Deek!" And then noticing the misery in his face, "Say, keed, what's hurting you? He remembered that she had always had a partiality for American lovers, and smiled.

"What are you doing? Come and have some tea and we can tell each other what's been happening. There's sure to be a quiet little place somewhere near here!"

"Tell me, 'ow is your friend, Dug . . . Duggie?" she asked as they walked along Piccadilly.

"Dead."

"I am sorree. And your other friend. I forgot 'is name?"

"Dead."

"Ah, les pauvres garçons," she muttered, and the tears started to her eyes. Dick's heart warmed to her. Lois had never been so sympathetic.

In a Bond Street tea-shop, over which presided a faded woman in faded green linen, Babette told him what had happened to her since they had last met. There was in truth not much that might not have been guessed, but she told her story with a poignant wealth of detail which delighted Dick and helped him for a moment to forget. Just before the outbreak of war she had returned to England,

and as an artiste from a gallant and popular ally had found numerous engagements during the first two years or so. She attributed her misfortunes, quite seriously, to the failure of the French offensive in 1917, for the revue in which she was dancing had come to an end about that time and she had been unable to secure another engagement. There followed a procession of fugitive and half-forgotten loves and then, with the intervention of the United States an American major had taken her under his protection. But he had been sent out to France shortly before the Armistice, leaving her a novel, if unreliable, vocabulary and a draft at a bank for fifty pounds: upon the disappearance of the latter she had returned to her old mode of life.

"It is at times amusing," she concluded. "But it is not what one could wish. One would like to change, but that is not possible."

"I know," said Dick. "The gutter's only six inches deep, but its damn hard to climb out of it."

Babette nodded wisely.

"And now it is oop to you, Deek; you tell."

Grateful to talk to some one who would at least not laugh at him, he told her everything, while she punctuated the story with sympathetic exclamations.

"Poor Deek," she said when he had finished, "you 'ave much suffered: it is terrible."

"Yes, Babette. We're both up against it."

There was a pause and then Babette clapped her hands in ecstasy.

"Tiens, mon ami. I 'ave an . . . an idée—a stunt? I have not tell you, but at last I 'ave an engagement. To-morrow I join a company as danseuse and we go to tour in Wales. . . . It is a nothing—but two pounds a week and one cannot live on that. But you shall come too, Deek, to look after me. It is arranged, yes?"

"Eh? cried Dick in surprise, "I'm not going on the stage, my dear girl—especially with one leg."

He thought of Shannon and Georgette and laughed.

"Silly—of course not. You will jus' follow the company and be my friend. It often arrives like that."

"Hold hard! This requires some thought," he said, rather dazed by the proposal, but flattered that she should want him. He felt that there was a good deal to be said in favour of it, for with her he would find at least some sort of affection and companionship and, as he was rich enough to give her everything she needed, she was bound in time to grow fond of him. But between her and Lois, what a difference! He winced at the comparison; Lois, secure in her beauty and her position, and this—this woman of the streets. He even doubted if he felt any emotion towards Babette: she belonged to the past and it is hard to rekindle fires long since dead.

"We loved each other once," she said tentatively, divining his thoughts.

He nodded. "That was a long time ago, and so many things have happened since then."

"Oh, if you don't want to. . . ." She shrugged her shoulders.

"I'm thinking."

"There is another fellow, 'oo is very keen to come with me. But 'e is old and I not like 'im very mooch? I dine with 'eem to-night and we talk of this, but it is not yet decided."

Whether this was true or whether it was merely said to make him more eager, Dick never discovered. He remained silent, weighing the pro's and con's.

"I would like better to go with you, Deek," she said alluringly, and then by way of memorial to the American major: "Say, is eet a business praposition?"

"I can't make up my mind on the spur of the moment, but I suppose you want to know at once?"

"You are not very eager, and I not desire to take you unwilling. You shall think well about it and let me know,

but you must tell me to-night. Let me see how we shall arrange that. I have not the telephone." She wrinkled her forehead in perplexity.

"I dine with my friend to-night, but I will not tell 'eem for sure. Ah, that is it. Listen, Deek, if you wish to come with me, you shall be at my *appartement* to-night at about eleven, and then. . . ." She laughed invitingly. "But if you shall not be there before eleven-thirty, I know that you do not come with me, and then in the morning I go and ring up my other friend. C'est entendu ?"

Unable to make up his mind and glad of the respite, Dick nodded. "Very well. Where do you live ?"

"I 'ave an *appartement* near Bakaire Street, a quarter very respectable. I give you a card. . . . And remember, Deek, do not drive up to the door, but a little distance away. And do not make too mooche noise. I 'ave give notice that I leave there to-morrow, but it may be that I come back one day, and they not like girls 'oo make noise. There 'ave been already questions."

"All right, all right," said Dick, cutting her short, "I'll be as quiet as a burglar. You seem pretty certain I'm coming."

"Sure theeng."

"All the same, I hate Wales."

"But 'eet is only for a month or so, and after, I go to Spain, to Sevilla, to dance there, if it shall be possible. I shall become a *grande artiste*. I 'ave demanded a passeport and you shall do the same. It will be superbe. One says it is the country made for love."

"For love-making, not for love," said Dick with a wry smile. They parted outside and almost unconsciously Dick strolled along until he reached the Brasserie Latine. The emotions of the day had tired him and he felt physically unable to come to a decision. There would be something dramatic in a frank renunciation of this conventional respectability, which had failed to give him what he needed,

but, as a mode of living, it did not allure him. He was fond of Babette in a way ; she was a link with the past, she was attractive, and above all she seemed to want him. But she had her limitations. Still, he could always leave her. But that thought made the affair appear even more fugitive, more sordid. Perhaps the Brasserie would help him to arrive at a decision, and so, ordering a drink, he sat down in his favourite corner, where he was presently joined by Praed.

"Have a drink. Have several drinks. Have some dinner with me," said Dick rather wildly.

Suspicious of this frenzied hospitality, Praed looked at him curiously, but the habits of a lifetime, during which he had never once refused refreshment, triumphed.

"I will, thanks. . . . You're still looking very depressed. And why this unwonted effusiveness ? Any connexion between the two ?"

"D'you know, Praed, that you're about the oldest friend I've got left ?" He laughed savagely. "It's not a pleasant thing to have to admit—but it's damn funny."

"May I ask why ?" demanded Praed blandly.

"Well, I don't care about confessing that one of my few remaining friends is an infernal waster like you." But though he did his best to insult him, Praed, with the prospect of unlimited drinks ahead, remained unruffled.

"Continue, laddie, if it does you good. You know I never show pique under any circumstances. You've taken a bit of a knock to-day and you're trying to get level with the world in general. That's it, isn't it ?"

"Yes, I'm just about knocked out now. It's a damnable world."

"It's run on a queer and incomprehensible system, you know."

Dick shrugged his shoulders.

"God fulfils Himself in many ways."

"There ought to be legislation about people quoting

Tennyson," declared Praed, with sudden heat. "It's a criminal habit."

Dick made an impatient gesture.

"Pooh, that old Victorian gas-lamp doesn't give much light. You're old-fashioned."

For a moment Dick relapsed into the argot of the Brasserie. "I'm old-fashioned enough to prefer Shakespeare to Shaw and Milton to Masfield. I pin my faith to stars, not to meteors."

"Ah, you've never outgrown your classical education," said Praed reprovingly.

"For God's sake, dry up. I'm not in the mood for that sort of drivel to-night. We're just posing. Everybody's posing. Gad, Praed, I thought the war would make people more natural and less complex, and so it did for a time. But now it's worse than ever. Every one's bragging about what he did in the Great War, every one's pretending to be what they aren't. Look at the women! Nowadays there's as much rouge on respectability as there is on prostitution. I'm sick of the whole thing!"

"Liver," said Praed.

"I wish it was, but it isn't. Still, I didn't ask you here to discuss the decline and fall of the British Empire. I'm in need of your advice, Praed, the advice of my old, tried and trusted friend, and I want you to apply to the problem your unrivalled knowledge of men and affairs and, above all, your nice sense of honour."

He spoke with bitter sarcasm, but Praed only laughed.

"I wonder they didn't make you a general in the army. Your idea of being offensive is so puerile that you could lose a battle with the best of them. All the same, if you want the benefit of my store of wisdom, you shall have it. But not before dinner. I become more mellow and valuable as the evening progresses."

And so over their liqueurs Dick told him with ironical humour the story of his rejection by Lois and the offer

which Babette had made to him, while Praed, portentiously drunk, listened solemnly. In his bitter mood the idea of seeking advice from one whom he profoundly despised pleased Dick, and he marshalled his facts as lucidly as though he were stating a case for counsel's consideration.

"You're young," said Praed, when he had finished—"younger even than the infernal stuff they sell here for brandy nowadays. No man under forty is entitled to be bitter. If you're rich enough, go abroad; if you aren't, leave Mayfair and go and live at Wapping. Change of scene, wonnerful'effec'. Any sort of change helps. Give up fizz and take to Burgundy."

"Don't be a damned fool. What I want to know is, shall I go with this girl or not?"

"Oh, as to that." He fumbled in his pocket, and then with apparent inconsequence: "Lend me half a crown—no, not two shillings, half a crown. Thank you. Now then, Heads you go with her, Tails you don't. Heads. Then you go." He slipped the coin into his pocket and rose unsteadily. "Always pleased to settle any little difficulties like that for you. Must be going. Got an appointment with a poet—they're as persistent as tradesmen—and as I owe him money, I mustn't be late. An epic and sixty-four brandy." He raised a deprecating hand as though to check a flow of thanks. "Not a word, my dear fellow. Only too pleased to have helped you. Only too pleased. Delightful evening."

After he had gone, Dick sat on, smoking, and pondering over the events of the day: the strange experience of the morning, the chance meeting with Babette and, most persistently, his dismissal by Lois. Again and again he went over the scene in his mind, and each time he saw it as something less dignified, more ludicrous. How that absurd search for the ring would have delighted Julian! He strove to compress his thoughts into a phrase, and as the waiter, an old friend, came up to know if he wanted a final

drink before closing time, he managed to coin his epigram.

"You 'ave 'ad a good evening, yes? A wonderful docteur, the Brasserie. On arrive triste, on part heureux," said the waiter, who was a bit of a philosopher in his own way—and in his own language.

"There's some fun in everything if you only look at it long enough," replied Dick with an air of discovery. "Every wave of tragedy has a backwash of humour!" But the waiter, whose knowledge of English was confined to terms of courtesy and cooking, had passed on to the next table.

Dick left the Brasserie without having made up his mind about Babette. For a time the question had been subordinated to other considerations, but now it returned with greater force and the need for decision became imminent. He half expected some unmistakable sign to guide him, but none appeared, and in the absence of any directing finger, he resolved to abide by the spin of the coin. Anyway, he would go and see Babette; there could be no harm in that, though he knew that, once there, he would never have the strength of will to leave her. He looked at his watch and found it was after half-past ten. The streets were thronged with people from the theatres and restaurants and cabs were at a premium, but by a stroke of luck an empty taxi pulled up near by and he managed to secure it.

"Where to?"

He fumbled in his pocket for Babette's card, and then remembered that she did not like cabs to drive up to her flat late at night.

"Take me to Baker Street Station."

As he was driven thither, the full and inevitable consequences of what he was about to do assailed his mind. That morning he had told himself that his whole world consisted of Lois and of Lois only, but now he realized that it included the Kinthorpes, and Dolores Shannon—especially Dolores. It was an understood thing that he was to go back to

Poldene at the end of the month to spend a week or two with them, and he knew that if he did not go they were bound sooner or later to learn the truth, and though they were broad minded enough not to condemn him, he felt that he must pause before he put their love to such a test. That Douglas had nearly done the same sort of thing would only add a sting to his action, and Dolores, for all her Bohemianism, must in her heart respect him less. If only he could have had more time to consider ! But the seconds ticked by inexorably. The cab pulled up at Baker Street, and at the sight of the ugly, pretentious little station, a host of memories crowded in upon him. His first embarrassed departure for Harrow ; Shannon, aged fifteen, demanding lurid French literature at the bookstall ; Trevannagh searching vaguely and unconcernedly for his hat-box—"because I'm quite sure I started with the blessed thing." He stared at the dimly-lit, squat building as though it had been a Temple of Friendship. It was a link with the past, a past in which Babette had no part, a past free from the futility and indulgence of the later years. Julian and Douglas had paid their debt, and he could not soil their sacrifice. . . . And yet, how absurd to be turned from one's purpose by a glimpse of Baker Street Station ! He laughed, hesitated, and then, taking Babette's card from his pocket, tore it across and threw the pieces away.

It was past midnight when he returned to his hotel, a large building at one of the railway termini, but though the place was deserted, a single lamp burned in the lounge to welcome a chance traveller. Here, worn out, he sat down for a moment to rest his leg, before climbing the stairs to his room and, as he did so, became aware of a figure sitting near by in the shadow of an alcove. He muttered some civility, which the stranger courteously acknowledged, and then sinking his head in his hands, sat there, beaten, finished.

"You seem in great trouble. Can I do nothing to help

you ? ” asked the stranger, and his voice was charged with a wise and tender sympathy.

Dick shook his head. “ After the war, life is a hard business for those of us who cannot forget.”

“ I know, I know,” said the stranger.

“ Perhaps, sir, you have lost some one, too ? ”

“ Yes, I have lost many children.”

In the silence that followed, a strange peace descended upon Dick, driving out the bitterness and despair and inspiring him with a new hope and a new courage.

“ It is impossible for me to understand why all this pain is allowed,” he said at length.

“ It is the payment for the sins of this generation and of the last,” replied the stranger. “ The world had become too slothful and easy, and the longer the reckoning is delayed, the more terrible shall that reckoning be. Blessed are they who have paid by death and sorrow.”

“ If one can discharge the debt by sorrow, then indeed I have discharged mine.”

“ Yes, you have paid in grief even as your two friends have paid with their lives.”

“ What do you know of my two friends ? ” he said, amazed.

Rising, the stranger lifted his hand in the gesture of benediction and, by the dim light, it seemed that across the palm ran the scar of a wound, freshly healed.

“ I, too, have paid,” he said gently.

THE END

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